

**‘PROUD PRESTON’:
A HISTORY OF THE FOOTBALL LEAGUE,
1900-1939**

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis is concerned with the growth and development of the Football League in the first four decades of the twentieth century. Its major aim is to analyse the League as a major early twentieth century sporting and social institution and to account for its ideologies and policies in relation to other such institutions. It is not intended to be a history of the Football League *per se* but concentrates on the position and role of the League within English society at the time. As such, a comparative perspective is maintained throughout by relating the development of the League to that of other football and sporting bodies, as well as popular entertainment institutions like the theatre, music-hall and cinema. Moreover, the thesis is more than a straightforward study of the Football League as an autonomous executive body. It adopts a broader conception of the League, encompassing the development of relations among players, directors and clubs within the League's jurisdiction and structure, and treating the central administrative body as a starting-point rather than the primary focus of analysis.

Previous historical accounts of the Football League in this period have fallen into two main categories: 'official' histories which chart and celebrate the 'rise' and 'progress' of the League and discuss its development uncritically and with no analytical perspective; and academic studies which present a vague and slightly nostalgic picture of its 'traditional' past to provide a contrast with the uncompromising elitist and commercial agenda of contemporary professional football. Both approaches have had the effect of divorcing the Football League from proper historical inquiry by treating its historical development as self-evident and unproblematic - a subject essentially without need of analysis. The present study is partly envisaged as a contribution to correct this situation by subjecting the League's development between 1900 and 1939 to a critical and detailed analysis.

It is contended that the history of the Football League in the first four decades of the twentieth century is inextricable from the history of professional football in general. The League ran the most prestigious competition with the best known players in the

largest and best equipped stadiums in the country. All the features of the game in England at the highest level - from the transfer system to the offside law - were established directly or indirectly by the League and its members clubs. Yet the League's remarkable public profile and commercial buoyancy by the beginning of the Second World War was achieved with little apparent intention or even consciousness on the part of its decision-makers. For the most part the Football League was a conservative and reactionary body which was slow to exploit commercial possibilities and reluctant to broaden its responsibilities beyond straightforward self-protection.

Chapter 1 provides a broad overview of the origins, the aims and the internal organisation of the Football League. It also briefly surveys the relationship with external bodies like the FA, the Southern League and the Players' Union, before moving on to a detailed biographical analysis of the League's officers and Management Committee members. As such, it serves to establish the institutional framework and ideological environment within which the Football League developed and its policy was constructed. Chapter 2 focuses on the contested process of League expansion and the whole debate centred around its transformation into a 'national league'. It also looks at the process of electing clubs in the context of the wider economic and geographical development of the League. In chapter 3 the institutional relationship with the governing body of English football, the FA, is explored, while chapter 4 maps out and examines the complex structure of power and decision-making existing between the central executive and the member clubs.

Chapters 5 and 6 are concerned with the Football League's performers and labour force: the players. As well as establishing empirical data on various aspects of the employment of players - such as wages, transfer conditions, contracts and insurance - these chapters analyse the development of labour relations in both their institutional, formalised version and their more spontaneous forms. What is more, they seek to determine how players were treated by their employers and to relate this to working conditions in industry as well as in parallel sporting and recreational sectors. Chapter 7 looks specifically at the organisation of the League as a sporting cartel in the context of both economic theory and practice. It assesses the importance of the pervasive ideology of equality and traces its influence on policy-making at executive and club

level. The last two chapters focus on the broader issues of the Football League's connection with, firstly, international football and, secondly, the 'football' and 'general' public. Chapter 8 is divided into two sections which consider in turn the League's relations with the more immediate Scottish, Welsh and Irish game and with football beyond the British Isles, especially in continental Europe. The League's role in the promotion of the game both inside and outside football grounds is discussed in chapter 9 and the conclusion briefly draws together the main themes and arguments of the thesis.

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ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE TEXT, FOOTNOTES AND APPENDICES

AFPU	Association Football Players' Union
AFPTU	Association Football Players' and Trainers Union
AGM	Annual General Meeting
AV	Aston Villa FC Archives
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
<i>BJSH</i>	<i>British Journal of Sports History</i>
EGM	Emergency General Meeting
FA	Football Association
FC	Football Club
FIFA	Federation Internationale de Football Association
FLMIF	Football League Mutual Insurance Federation
FMIF	Football Mutual Insurance Federation
GFTU	General Federation of Trade Unions
<i>IJHS</i>	<i>International Journal of the History of Sport</i>
MCC	Marylebone Cricket Club
PFA	Professional Footballers' Association Archives
SGM	Special General Meeting

INTRODUCTION

The noble game of football is all the rage you'll own,
And lately in that kind of sport, Proud Preston she has shown,
That in her town, she does possess, the men I'm proud to say,
Who can now play and beat some of the crack teams of the day.¹

1. The Place of the Football League in English Society

Since its inception in 1888 the Football League has held an ambivalent place in the national psyche. To many sports enthusiasts its creation was fundamental to the long term survival of professional football. A fixed programme of matches between the leading clubs appeared to solve the insecurities, financial and otherwise, inherent in the 'lax and loose system' prevalent before 1888.² Moreover, the system was immediately popular among spectators and much of the local and national press. Within five months of the inaugural season *Athletic News* declared that from a 'financial point of view, the competition has been a distinct success' while others agreed that 'inclusion in the League means an almost safe exchequer for the season for a club... and a very great addition to the interest in its matches'.³ By 1906 the League's founder William McGregor could describe the 'principle' of League football as 'the dominating influence in the game', replicated in competitive sports across the globe and even by the colleges of Oxford and Cambridge, those bastions of amateur ideals.⁴

¹ Quoted in Tony Mason, 'Football, Sport of the North?' in Jeff Hill and Jack Williams (eds), *Sport and Identity in the North of England*, Keele, 1996, p. 46. The quotation is taken from G. B. Browne's music-hall song commemorating the success of Preston North End, the first champions of the Football League. Subsequently the phrase 'Proud Preston' slipped into commonly usage, along with the epithet 'Invincibles', to describe the Preston team of the late 1880s and early 1890s. See, for examples, *Topical Times*, 8 February 1928; Percy M. Young, *A History of British Football*, London, 1968, p. 180. The phrase has been used in this context to illuminate a number of themes relating to the history of the Football League as a sporting and social organisation in the 1900-39 period, most obviously its regional origins and administrative base but also its jealously guarded independence, pride and perceived superiority in relation to other organisations.

² William McGregor, 'The Origin and Future of the Football League' in Alfred Gibson and William Pickford (eds.), *Association Football and the Men Who Made It*, vol. 2, London, 1906, p. 2.

³ Stephen Tischler, *Footballers and Businessmen: The Origins of Professional Soccer in England*, London, 1981, p. 59.

⁴ McGregor, 'Origin and Future', p. 1.

For others the Football League was synonymous with the ascendancy of commerce and money over true sport. Critics such as FA vice-president N. L. Jackson maintained a vigorous attack on the principles and structure of the League: it was decried as a purely commercial and selfish venture conducted without consideration of the needs of the smaller clubs and provincial associations.⁵ As the former amateur international G. O. Smith noted in 1899, 'Opponents of the League describe it as a combination founded on self-interest, the members of which are only kept together by motives of selfishness and hopes of mutual profit'.⁶ According to this view, the Football League augmented professional football's negative features. A contemporary account described the system as 'bad for the players, worse for the spectators. The former learn improvident habits, become vastly conceited, whilst failing to see that they are treated like chattels, and cannot help but be brutalised. The latter are injured physically and morally'.⁷ Even the term 'league' took on a pejorative meaning in certain circles. McGregor himself acknowledged the opposition which the League attracted as 'an all powerful combination of clubs to which £.s.d. is admittedly the most vital consideration'.⁸

Studies of the contemporary football industry, however, have tended to downplay the conflict and change at the heart of the Football League's pre-1945 history. Sociologists and cultural theorists have placed particular emphasis on the apparent changing perspectives of the governing bodies and the clubs. The notion of professional football as a 'family' or 'community' of shared interests, it is alleged, has been replaced over the last thirty or so years by a more uncompromising elitist and commercial agenda. Two examples of such an approach appeared in an academic work, *British Football and Social Change*, published in 1991. In a study of the globalisation of modern English football, Stephen Wagg and Adrian Goldberg suggested that traditionally the 'financial arrangements made by the Football League

⁵ Tischler, *Footballers and Businessmen*, p. 58; Wray Vamplew, *Pay Up and Play the Game: Professional Sport in Britain, 1863-1914*, Cambridge, 1989, p. 125; Brian Dobbs, *Edwardians at Play: Sport, 1890-1914*, London, 1973, pp. 45-46. Also see Derek Birley, *Land of Sport and Glory: Sport and British Society, 1887-1910*, Manchester, 1995, p. 36.

⁶ G. O. Smith, 'Origin and Benefits of the League and the Effects of Professionalism on the Game' in Montague Shearman (ed.), *Football*, London, 1899, p. 171.

⁷ Ernest Ensor, 'The Football Madness', *Contemporary Review*, 74, 1898.

⁸ McGregor, 'Origin and Future', p. 1.

have... been collectivist' and the decision-making structure 'at least semi-democratic', while Alan Tomlinson indicated that the Football League before 1950 could be described metaphorically as a 'family or a friendly society'.⁹

The basis for these assumptions, however, was unclear. Neither author supported their arguments with solid historical evidence but appeared merely to juxtapose a detailed analysis of the ruptures in contemporary League football with a vague and slightly nostalgic picture of its 'traditional' past. This kind of approach is reflected in a great deal of the popular and indeed even academic writing on the League, which has tended to treat its historical development as self-evident and unproblematic - a subject essentially without need of analysis. The case of the League seems to bear similarities to John Walton's comments about the fish and chip trade. 'It is presumed to be... timeless', says Walton, 'it has always been there, but it has no 'history' in the sense of transforming itself, affecting people's lives for good or ill in significant ways, or interacting with the... concerns of statesmen or diplomats'.¹⁰ Divorced from proper historical inquiry, then, myths about the League have been perpetuated and assumptions left unexplored. This thesis is partly envisaged as a contribution to correct this situation by providing a detailed analysis of the Football League's development in the first forty years of this century.

As a major social and leisure institution, with its own bureaucracy and administrative structure, its own rules, regulations and policy imperatives, the Football League has had a significance far beyond the bounds of what might be called the football world. At the League's Jubilee Banquet in 1938, FA president William Pickford summed up the broader role of the League as follows:

If one thinks of the vast assets of the League clubs in property alone... of the huge sums they raise and distribute among players and staffs, the Exchequer, the Postmaster General, the railway and transport companies, and a hundred and one others, and endeavour to visualise the interest, excitement, and pleasure that its competitors bring into the lives of

⁹ Adrian Goldberg and Stephen Wagg, 'It's not a knockout: English football and globalisation', p. 242; Alan Tomlinson, 'North and South: the rivalry of the Football League and the Football Association', p. 35, both in John Williams and Stephen Wagg (eds), *British Football and Social Change: Getting into Europe*, Leicester, 1991.

¹⁰ John Walton, *Fish & Chips and the British Working Class, 1870-1940*, Leicester, 1992, p. 1.

millions of people, one can begin to form an idea of its importance in the life of the nation.¹¹

While this view of the League may be hyperbolic, the basic impression it gives is nevertheless of some importance. The economic dimensions of the Football League's activities are perhaps the easiest to quantify. Political and Economic Planning's (PEP) 1951 report revealed that, in the 1937-38 season, 31.43 million spectators, paying £1.57 million in admission charges, had watched matches in the four divisions of the League. In addition, the League was related to a number of ancillary industries, most significantly the pools and the sporting press. As *The Times* commented in 1937, 'The pools, the transfer system and the amount of money involved in the gates have turned football into something like a national industry'.¹² Football in this sense was synonymous with the Football League.

One could also put a powerful case for the League as the conveyor of a significant cultural phenomenon. Whether or not one accepts the view that football in this period represented the working man's religion or was organically linked to the working-class community, it clearly mattered to many people and formed an important part of English social life.¹³ Successful clubs like Aston Villa and Arsenal and players like Billy Meredith, 'Dixie' Dean and Alex James represented, especially in the period of a proliferating sports-related media and the cult of the cigarette card, a cultural reference point which went beyond the local community. Moreover, the Saturday afternoon League programme had become a characteristic ritual of professional sport in this country. According to Richard Holt, this 'world of clanking turnstiles and vast stadia [represented] the most popular and highly organised programme of spectator sport in existence'.¹⁴ And, from the early 1930s, millions more were symbolically attached to the League through the emergence of the football pools and its sub-culture.

¹¹ Quoted in Simon Inglis, *League Football and the Men Who Made It*, London, 1988, p. 162.

¹² Stephen Jones, 'The Economic Aspects of Association Football in England, 1918-39', *BJSH*, 1, 1, 1984, p. 288-89. The quotation is from James Walvin, *The People's Game: The History of Football Revisited*, Edinburgh, 1994, p. 128.

¹³ See Nicholas Fishwick, *English Football and Society, 1910-50*, Manchester, 1989, chapter 7; Stephen Jones, *Sport, Politics and the working class*, Manchester, 1988, pp. 54-58. Also Tony Mason, *Association Football and English Society, 1863-1915*, Brighton, chapter 8.

¹⁴ Richard Holt, *Sport and the British: A Modern History*, Oxford, 1989, p. 2.

Aside from the wider economic and cultural implications of its activities, the League was a major social institution in its own right. This period saw the development of a network of links with sporting, social and governmental bodies and the emergence of a distinctive public image. As Pickford's quotation indicates, the League made personal and formal contacts with several government departments, lobbied for concessions in travel costs and even publicly pronounced its position on the outbreak of war in 1914. Indeed, its decision to continue League football up to July 1915 resulted in what president John McKenna referred to as a 'tirade of abuse' from the middle and upper classes and even some pressure on the government to ban professional football. In its attempts to rehabilitate its public image, the League, along with the FA, donated significant amounts of money to charities and the war effort; a practice which was extended after the war to include donations to disaster appeals.¹⁵

Unlike other sporting bodies like the MCC, therefore, the Football League was more than a private club. By this stage at least, it was a self-consciously public body, whose decisions and actions had a resonance in the wider social and political arena. Having said this, the League retained in many respects a distinctly private and insular perspective. Committee members were often highly suspicious of outsiders, whether from within the football world or not, and of extraneous attempts to interfere in League affairs. Hence, in 1912 the Management Committee banned people not officially associated with League clubs from attending the annual meeting and, throughout the period, prevented press access to those meetings considered to be of a private and confidential nature.¹⁶ Correspondence and inquiries from external bodies such as the Player's Union, the BBC and the Pool's Promoters' Association were often ignored or, at best, merely acknowledged. Furthermore, for much of the period up to 1920, and arguably for some time thereafter, the League as a collective eschewed any pretensions to act as a governing body of professional football, preferring instead to behave in an aloof, self-concerned and parochial manner. It is not insignificant that the League was based from 1902 at Preston, or that all four

¹⁵ See chapter 9. A. J. Arnold, "'Not Playing the Game'?: Leeds City in the Great War', *IJHS*, 1990, pp. 112-13.

¹⁶ Minutes of Football League, 10 May 1912. Some elements of the press consistently complained of the secrecy of the League's activities. See *Athletic News*, 23 September 1901.

presidents in this period, as well as the secretaries and other office staff, were drawn exclusively from Lancashire. It could be, at different times, both proud of its regional roots and conscious of its wider responsibilities on a national scale. The League thus exhibited a complex set of identities: a curious blend of the public and the private, the national and the parochial.

It must be stated here that a case is not being made for the study of the Football League *per se*: James Bradley has explicitly warned historians studying sport of this danger, stating that: 'if too much time is spent studying a central organisation it might appear that that is the only important element'.¹⁷ An analysis of the League's accounts, internal regulations and business practices alone could well produce a good business history but will tell us little about the complicated ways in which professional football in general interacted with broader social, economic and political changes. The scope of this study is thus wider than it might first appear, as it encompasses the development of relations among the players, directors and clubs within the League's jurisdiction and structure, and treats the central administrative body as a starting-point rather than the primary focus of analysis.

Moreover, the growth of the Football League did not occur in isolation: it had parallels in other countries, in other sports and in other sectors of the leisure industry. The Scottish Football League and the Northern Rugby Union (later the Rugby League) were both partially influenced by the formation and rise of the League, although they developed regulations and policies which reflected distinct traditions, values and material conditions.¹⁸ Likewise, as Stephen Jones has shown, professional football was one part, albeit a highly significant one, of a more general process of commercial leisure expansion beginning in the late Victorian and Edwardian periods and continuing throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Industries such as cinema, broadcasting

¹⁷ James Bradley, 'The MCC, Society and Empire: A Portrait of Cricket's Ruling Body, 1860-1914' in J. A. Mangan (ed.), *The Cultural Bond: Sport, Empire, Society*, London, 1992, p. 44.

¹⁸ For Scotland, see Bob Crampsey, *The Scottish Football League: The First 100 Years*, Glasgow, 1990, pp. 1-16; for Rugby League, Eric Dunning and Kenneth Sheard, *Barbarians, Gentlemen and Players. A Sociological Study of the Development of Rugby Football*, Oxford, 1979, pp. 170-74. Also Geoffrey Moorhouse, *A People's Game: The Official History of Rugby League, 1895-1995*, London, 1995; Keith Macklin, *The History of Rugby League Football*, London, 1962; Graham Williams, *The Code War*, Harefield, 1994.

and spectator sport exhibited common structural features and experienced commercialisation in comparable, yet individually constructed, ways.¹⁹ A comparison of labour relations in the Football League with those between music-hall artists and proprietors, for instance, is therefore not a futile exercise. Not only were such comparisons frequently made at the time, they can also help enlighten us as to the beliefs and circumstances which shaped English professional football in the period and set it apart from other entertainments and sports.²⁰ Hence, this study will concentrate on the position and role of the League within both the immediate leisure environment and English society in general.

There can be little doubt that the history of the Football League in the first four decades of the twentieth century is inextricable from the history of professional football in general. The League ran the most prestigious competition with the best known players in the largest and best equipped stadiums in the country. All the features of the game in England at the highest level - from the transfer system to the offside law - were established directly or indirectly by the League and its member clubs. But the precise role of the League has been elusive for both contemporary observers and historians. It has been seen variously as an employers association, intent on setting wage levels, conditions, standards of work and the like²¹; as a business or, more precisely, a commercial cartel²²; as 'a body of entertainers' whose primary aim it was to distract the public²³; and as 'the great organiser and controller' of the professional game.²⁴ These perspectives are not, of course, mutually exclusive: the League was all these things and often at the same time.

¹⁹ Stephen Jones, *Workers at Play: A Social and Economic History of Leisure, 1918-39*, London, 1986, chapter 2.

²⁰ See Lois Rutherford, "'Managers in a small way': The Professionalisation of Variety Artistes, 1860-1914' in Peter Bailey (ed.), *Music Hall: The Business of Pleasure*, Milton Keynes, 1986, pp. 93-119; Peter Bailey, 'Custom, Capital and Culture in the Victorian Music Hall' in Robert D. Storch (ed.), *Popular Culture and Custom in Nineteenth-Century England*, London, 1982, pp. 180-208. For cinema, Michael Chanan, 'The Emergence of an Industry' in James Curran and Vincent Porter (eds.), *British Cinema History*, London, 1983, p. 48; Stephen Jones, *The British Labour Movement and Film, 1918-39*, London, 1987, chapter 3. Also, see William Pickford's comparison of the role of professional footballers and other sportsmen and entertainers in *Athletic News*, 27 March 1911.

²¹ Tischler, *Footballers and Businessmen*.

²² Vamplew, *Pay Up*.

²³ Comment by FA president Charles Clegg at the Football League 'Coming-of-Age' Banquet, reported in *Athletic News*, 14 June 1909.

²⁴ *Athletic News*, 24 May 1920.

2. The League and the Historiography of English Football

It is not overstating matters to say that the Football League has been left largely untouched in the historiography of English football. This might seem perplexing at first glance, given Tony Mason's comments that the early history of football has been written largely 'in terms of the institutions, players and matches'.²⁵ There are indeed a number of articles, including those by the League's founder William McGregor in the 1906 *Book of Football* and by journalist and ex-player Ivan Sharpe, which discuss the structure and development of the League, while Percy Young's 1968 book, *A History of British Football*, gives some coverage of League affairs.²⁶ Perhaps this material has led professional historians to steer clear of the subject? Whatever the case, another of Mason's comments, that football history before the 1970s 'was largely in the hands of administrators and journalists' seems particularly pertinent in the case of the League.²⁷

Essentially the history of the Football League has been written from the inside, uncritically and with no analytical perspective. There have been two general histories of the League. The first, titled *The Story of the Football League*, was written in 1938, the League's Jubilee Year, by then president Charles Sutcliffe, secretary Fred Howarth and a Preston journalist J. A. Brierley. As might be expected, it is an uncritical celebration of the organisation's development which, informative though it is, tells us more about the League's public and self-image in 1938 and the preoccupations of its authors than anything else. A more recent work is Simon Inglis' *League Football and the men who made it*, published in 1988 as the 'Official Centenary History of the Football League'. Inglis, a journalist and architect best known for his writing about football grounds, does inform his narrative with an element of social history and understands that the League did not develop in isolation but within a wider social, economic and political framework. Nevertheless, although it is relatively objective

²⁵ Tony Mason, 'Football and the Historians', *IJHS*, 5, 1, 1988, p. 136.

²⁶ William McGregor, 'The League and the League System' and 'The £.s.d. of football' in *Book of Football*, 1906; Ivan Sharpe, 'The Men who made League Football' in A. H. Fabian and Geoffrey Green (eds.), *Association Football*, London, 1960, pp. 283-309; Young, *History of British Football*, especially chapters 11-13. Geoffrey Green, *The History of the Football Association*, London, 1953, deals extensively with relations between the League and the FA in chapter 9.

²⁷ Mason, 'Football and the Historians', p. 136.

for an 'official' history, it ultimately presents a picture of the League as the League would want to be seen. As with the Jubilee history, sources are assessed uncritically and there is no real attempt to relate the League to its changing social context.²⁸

Academic studies have not filled this historiographical gap either. While the work of Tony Mason, Nicholas Fishwick and Charles Korr, in particular, has added to our understanding of the objectives, composition and management of professional League clubs and Stephen Jones has placed the club firmly in its wider economic and commercial context, little attention has been paid to the controlling body.²⁹ Indeed, there is an implicit strand of thinking in some of these studies which treats football's 'ruling class' - club owners, directors, the FA and the League administration - as a monolithic group. Steven Tischler, in particular, while admittedly operating within a fairly rigid Marxist perspective, uses the terms 'football establishment', 'football hierarchy' and 'football authorities' as interchangeable labels to describe any elite owner or official.³⁰ Although it is true that to some extent those groups were interchangeable - club directors were League Committee members and Committee members were often FA councillors - it is nonetheless an oversimplification which fails to recognise the League as an autonomous institution.

The application of economic theory to sports history has helped clarify the distinctive role of organisations like the Football League. Wray Vamplew's study of British professional sport up to 1914 is the essential work in this respect. Drawing on the work of North American sports economists, Vamplew sought to analyse the theories relating to sporting leagues in an historical context, by perceiving the Football League as a commercial cartel

²⁸ Charles Sutcliffe, J. A. Brierley and Fred Howarth, *The Story of the Football League, 1888-1938*, Preston, 1938; Inglis, *League Football*, p. vii. There have been other works relating to the League which focus mainly on statistics and the achievements of famous players and clubs. See, for example, R. C. Churchill, *English League Football*, London, 1960; Maurice Golesworthy, *We are the champions: a history of the Football League champions, 1888-1972*, London, 1972; and more recently, Bryon Butler, *The Football League. The First 100 Years*, Guildford, 1988.

²⁹ Mason, *Association Football*; Fishwick, *English Football*; Charles Korr, *West Ham United. The Making of a Football Club*, London, 1988; Jones, 'Economic Aspects'.

³⁰ Tischler, *Footballers and Businessmen*.

with a central controlling body setting the economic rules, operating quality control via promotion and relegation and other restrictions on entry, and... circumscribing the economic freedom of sports labourers in an effort to maintain equality of competition.³¹

Yet as his study centred on cricket, horse racing and rugby league as well as football, and stretched only as far as 1914, Vamplew was unable to fully analyse the problematic development of the League cartel, including conflicting interests and changing objectives and policies. Tony Arnold's business history of professional football in Bradford has also proved instructive by approaching the issues from a regional perspective. For Arnold, the business activity of the Bradford clubs, City and Park Avenue, was linked to local trade and economic fluctuations but was, at the same time, contingent upon the regulations imposed upon them as members of the Football League. League clubs thus displayed dual personalities: as both semi-autonomous local sporting institutions and national cartel members.³²

Yet while a recognition of the often peculiar economic arrangement of professional football generally, and the Football League in particular, will inform much of this study, its importance should not be overstated. Although economic considerations may have been central to League and club officials, the pursuit of profit clearly was not. Mason, Vamplew and Fishwick have persuasively argued that club directors and shareholders were rarely influenced primarily by the profit motive. Not only did the FA restrict the dividend payable to shareholders to 5 per cent before 1914, and 7.5 per cent thereafter, they also expressly forbade the payment of directors. Consequently *Athletic News* could assert that 'No one who is out for a business return will look at football shares.'³³ More fundamentally, concentration on the economic side of the League tends to obscure the social, political and purely sporting factors which might have led the League to operate as it did. The principles of 'equality of competition' and 'fair competition' which became so central to League officials in this period were influenced as much by sporting values and conceptions of 'fair play' as by the desire

³¹ Vamplew, *Pay Up*, p. 17.

³² A. J. Arnold, *A Game That Would Pay: A Business History of Professional Football in Bradford*, London, 1988.

³³ Quoted in Mason, *Association Football*, p. 48. Also see Vamplew, *Pay Up*, chapter 10; Fishwick, *English Football*, pp. 27-32.

to increase gate receipts. Profit-maximisation was certainly not a major aim of those who ran the League: instead they were motivated by a range of objectives centred around the need to secure the survival of the League and enhance its status as a competition and an institution. Clearly professional football was a business and the Football League acted as a cartel, but never in a conventional sense.

3. Methods and Sources

The central sources for the thesis are the archives and records of the Football League, the Football Association, the Professional Footballers' Association (the Players' Union) and the professional football clubs which were full or associate members of the League. Along with the League, the FA and the Players' Union formed what Geoffrey Green called the 'three corners of the triangle' in the administration of English football, whose interaction determined the development of the game.³⁴ The minute books of executive, committee and sub-committee meetings have been consulted, along with files of correspondence and other records. The Football League, however, did not allow access to its private minutes, correspondence or other records³⁵ and so it has been necessary to make use of both the printed version of the minutes kept by the FA and the member clubs and the reports of meetings in the press. The clubs whose archives have been consulted are intended to reflect a representative sample of the League membership, both in terms of geography and playing success. Aston Villa, West Bromwich Albion, Wolverhampton Wanderers and Walsall from the Midlands; Oldham Athletic from Lancashire; Sheffield United and Huddersfield Town from Yorkshire; West Ham United from London; and Ipswich Town from East Anglia, provided a geographical cross-section³⁶: in playing terms, they represent a mixture of consistent first division clubs, teams who spent time in both the top two divisions and, in Walsall and Ipswich Town, clubs from the third division sections. The material available at the clubs varied significantly, although there were extensive and complete minute books of board meetings, along with correspondence, wage

³⁴ Green, *History of the FA*, p. 390.

³⁵ The only records made available for consultation were the club attendance books dating from 1925 and the annual handbooks which included the League's rules, bye-laws and other regulations.

³⁶ Although none of the club's private archives were available, Arsenal FC houses a number of records, including journalist James Catton's folders of newspaper clippings, letters and other correspondence.

books and the like at Sheffield United, West Ham United and Aston Villa. For this reason, the evidence used is to some extent weighted towards the experience of these three clubs.

Newspaper sources are also central to the thesis. Local and national as well as sporting and non-sporting newspapers have been consulted. Most important, however, is *Athletic News*, a sporting newspaper published in Manchester from 1875 to 1931. Its relevance to students of professional football is explained not merely by its circulation figures and popularity, significant though these were. Its quoted readership leapt from some 20,000 in 1888, the year in which the Football League was founded, to 180,000 by 1896 and Mason has claimed that 'it was without doubt the country's leading football weekly in the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first fifteen years of the twentieth'; by 1919 weekly sales were at 170,000 and declined thereafter until it was taken over by the *Sporting Chronicle* in 1931.³⁷ What is more important is the reputation it developed before and throughout most of this period as a mouthpiece of particular sections of the football establishment, especially the Football League. The national scope of its reporting and its serious and sober approach to the game gave it the label, before the First World War at least, as '*The Times of football*'.³⁸ More than this, its close links with League administrators and club directors made it almost the official voice of the League: Inglis has described it as 'the League's very own in-house publication'.³⁹ Thus it has been used extensively throughout the following chapters.

Although the autobiographies or memoirs of some players and administrators whose careers coincided with the 1900-39 period have been used, it is necessary to emphasise the limits of these sources. In general, though players do make references to their relationship with their clubs and sometimes to contract or transfer disputes and negotiations, there is rarely any mention of the Football League itself. This can certainly be interpreted as evidence of the distance between the player and the League but it also reflects the fact that there is very little behind-the-scenes discussion in

³⁷ Mason, *Association Football*, p. 191; Fishwick, *English Football*, p. 102.

³⁸ Fishwick, *English Football*, p. 102.

³⁹ Inglis, *League Football*, p. vi.

football players' autobiographies: not surprisingly the game itself is invariably given the bulk of the attention. For administrators the main problem is the paucity of published memoirs. Not one of the Management Committee members or club directors of the period wrote autobiographies, and only William Pickford, Frederick Wall and Stanley Rous did so at the FA. Such references as there are to the lives and careers of League representatives have had to be pieced together through newspaper accounts, obituaries and one or two collective biographies which appeared in Pickford and Gibson's *Association Football and the Men Who Made It* and Sutcliffe and Hargreaves' *History of the Lancashire FA*.⁴⁰ Another possible method of inquiry which has not been used is the oral interview, because it was found that there were not enough living ex-League players or officials to provide an adequate sample for research purposes.

The chronological boundaries of the thesis also need to be explained as they do not conform with what might be considered the 'natural' time-span for a study of the Football League. Although the League was founded in 1888, the start of the twentieth century has been taken as the starting-point because it coincided with a number of significant changes in its organisation and policy. Firstly, the introduction of the maximum wage in 1901 marked a watershed not only in the management and control of football employees but also in the broader approach of the League executive towards the idea of equality of competition. The introduction of the system of automatic promotion and relegation between the two divisions in 1898 had similar implications, while other developments such as the creation of the Inter-League Board with Scotland a year earlier led Sutcliffe to regard this period 'as marking a definite turn in the League's history'.⁴¹ Secondly, the ostensibly trivial change in secretaries from Harry Lockett to Tom Charnley in 1902 actually heralded a significant development in that the Football League was established in its first permanent offices in Preston. This gave the organisation a central headquarters for member clubs and outside parties to contact but also gave the impression that this was a stable, secure and *permanent* body. Previously, one can argue, the League was essentially little

⁴⁰ Pickford and Gibson (eds), *Association Football*, vol. 3; C. E. Sutcliffe and F. Hargreaves, *History of the Lancashire FA, 1878-1928*, Blackburn, 1928.

⁴¹ Sutcliffe *et al.*, *Football League*, p. 13.

more than a mailing or telegraphic address and not a physical entity in its own right. While 1900 is the starting-point, however, discussion of the League's development in the preceding twelve years is nonetheless crucial as a background to the events of the twentieth century. The beginning of the Second World War acts as an obvious chronological end for the study as, in contrast with the 1914-18 war, the League competition was abandoned immediately and clubs pledged themselves unanimously to devote facilities and manpower to the war effort. Regional League and cup competitions did slowly reappear but these were recognised as fundamentally different in every respect from peacetime football.⁴² Moreover, the basic continuity which marked the management of the Football League in the First World War was not repeated in the Second: the officials and executive which emerged in 1945 were much different from those who had taken the decision to suspend the League programme in September 1939.

4. Thesis Structure

The thesis is divided into thematic chapters focusing on different aspects of the Football League's internal structure and development, its relations with other bodies in the football world and with its audience and the broader public. While the chapters have not been arranged chronologically, it is nonetheless recognised that the period can be separated into distinct phases: the most obvious division being first, 1900 to 1914; second, the First World War; and finally the inter-war period, with the depression years of the late 1920s and early 1930s perhaps representing a further chronological departure. There are certainly aspects of the League's activities which can be easily separated into these time-frames, but there is also evidence of considerable continuity across them and so it was decided on thematic chapters which either explicitly or implicitly incorporate this chronology as the most appropriate arrangement. Even so, certain chapters are broadly based on these chronological periods. Chapters 2 and 3, in particular, concentrate on the pre-1914 period while chapters 8 and 9 cover mainly the inter-war years.

⁴² See Pierre Lanfranchi and Matthew Taylor, 'Professional Football in Second World War Britain' in Pat Kirkham and David Thoms (eds), *War Culture: Social Change and Changing Experience in World War Two*, London, 1995, pp. 187-97.

Chapter 1 provides a broad overview of the origins, the aims and the internal organisation of the Football League. It also briefly surveys the relationship with external bodies like the FA, the Southern League and the Players' Union, before moving on to a detailed biographical analysis of the League's officers and Management Committee members. As such, it serves to establish the institutional framework and ideological environment within which the Football League developed and its policy was constructed. Chapter 2 focuses on the contested process of League expansion and the whole debate centred around its transformation into a 'national league'. It also looks at the process of electing clubs in the context of the wider economic and geographical development of the League. In chapter 3 the institutional relationship with the governing body of English football, the FA, is explored, while chapter 4 maps out and examines the complex structure of power and decision-making existing between the central executive and the member clubs.

Chapters 5 and 6 are concerned with the Football League's performers and labour force: the players. As well as establishing empirical data on various aspects of the employment of players - such as wages, transfer conditions, contracts and insurance - these chapters analyse the development of labour relations in both their institutional, formalised version and their more spontaneous forms. What is more, they seek to determine how players were treated by their employers and to relate this to working conditions in industry as well as in parallel sporting and recreational sectors. Chapter 7 looks specifically at the organisation of the League as a sporting cartel in the context of both economic theory and practice. It assesses the importance of the pervasive ideology of equality and traces its influence on policy-making at executive and club level. The last two chapters focus on the broader issues of the Football League's connection with, first, international football and, second, the 'football' and 'general' public. Chapter 8 is divided into two sections which consider in turn the League's relations with the more immediate Scottish, Welsh and Irish game and with football beyond the British Isles, especially in continental Europe. The League's role in the promotion of the game both inside and outside football grounds is discussed in

chapter 9 and the conclusion briefly draws together the main themes and arguments of the thesis.

Finally, it is necessary to explain the use of certain terms in the text of the thesis. For the sake of convenience and to avoid too much repetition, certain common terms have been shortened or used interchangeably with others. The Football League Management Committee is abbreviated in most cases to the 'Management Committee' but the terms 'Committee' and 'executive' have also been used. The Football League is similarly referred to at times simply as the 'League' and occasionally, in line with the practice of diplomatic historians, is identified by the centre of its government (or its headquarters) as 'Preston'. Likewise, the FA is also described as 'the governing body' or 'the parent body'. The Association Football Players' (and Trainers') Union is referred to throughout the text by its popular title, the Players' Union.

CHAPTER ONE

AIMS, ORGANISATION AND STRUCTURE

By the beginning of the twentieth century the major features of the Football League's internal structure and external relations were already in place. It had evolved from a combination of twelve clubs located in the north-west and the midlands in 1888 to become a nationwide competition of thirty-six clubs separated into two divisions. Major cities like Manchester, Sheffield, Newcastle and London were now represented by League clubs and many more sought election annually. The administrative structure and machinery had also become firmly established: monthly meetings of the Management Committee, regular circulars from the Committee to the clubs, and the annual re-election process for clubs and officials were all integral to the way the Football League operated. In addition, relations with the Scottish League had been institutionalised through the creation of the Inter-League Board in 1898 while formal and informal contacts existed with other professional leagues as well as with the FA and the Players' Union. As Simon Inglis has commented, the League was beginning to show signs of 'substance and permanence'.¹

Yet although the Football League may have been the most advanced of its type in Britain, and even Europe, its administration was still in many respects rudimentary. It was in the process of the next four decades that the League really began to take on the characteristics of a modern bureaucracy. Any analysis of the organisation of a sporting body such as the League must therefore recognise elements of change and development rather than viewing it simply as a static structure. This chapter aims to outline and describe the basic structure of the Football League in the period. The opening section will examine the League's place within the wider sphere of football politics, especially its complex and changing relations with the Players' Union and the Southern League. This will be followed by a discussion of the League's internal administration before turning, in the final section, to a detailed analysis of the social composition and collective culture of the central executive body, the Management

¹ Inglis, *League Football*, p. 48.

Committee. But first, it is necessary to briefly examine the initial objectives of the League's founders.

1. The Origins of the League and the Objectives of its Founders

In view of the expansion and influence of both the Football League and the League system during this century, it has been tempting for writers to overemphasise the scope of the original scheme. The suggestion, popularised by the founder William McGregor, that the League was initially advocated as a governing body of professional football is therefore rather misleading.² Although certain club directors may have privately envisaged the League as the basis of a professional football empire in competition with the FA, its creation was essentially a practical response to a number of difficulties in the management of clubs which had arisen following the legalisation of professionalism in 1885. The most obvious problem was the lack of a pre-arranged and permanent schedule of matches. For clubs with large wage bills to meet in addition to other expenses, gate receipts provided no guarantee of a sufficient regular income. As McGregor commented, 'fixtures were kept and cancelled in a capricious way'.³ The common arrangement of home and away matches, with the host retaining the gate money, was frequently disrupted by unexpected cup engagements, incomplete teams or bad weather. Without contractual commitments a club either suffered considerable losses or their secretary was forced at the last minute 'to have to rush about, wire, and write all over the county in order to get a match'.⁴ At best this rendered fixture lists useless: at worst it could lead to bankruptcy.

Those matches that were played were often uncompetitive affairs which drew small crowds. The leading clubs generally entered as many as four or five cup competitions, mainly local or county-based, which could produce unattractive one-sided matches in the early rounds or, worse still, blank dates if a club were knocked out.⁵ Potentially profitable were the periodic friendly fixtures with local rivals and, increasingly from

² McGregor, 'The League', 1906, p. 174; Vamplew, *Pay Up*, p. 125; Bill Murray, *Football: A History of the World Game*, Aldershot, 1994, p. 38.

³ McGregor, 'Origin and Future', p. 2.

⁴ McGregor, 'The League', p. 171. Tischler, *Footballers and Businessmen*, p. 57, gives examples of the disputes which arose between clubs as a result of fixture problems.

⁵ McGregor, 'Origin and Future', p.2; Churchill, *English League Football*, p. 15.

the mid-1880s, major sides from outside the area. Yet even prestigious opponents could not guarantee large attendances: Aston Villa and Bolton Wanderers, both founder members of the League, reportedly drew only 4,000-5,000 spectators for their matches in pre-League days, compared with attendances of 7,000 to 8,000 less than five years later.⁶ With the onset of economic depression in 1886 and 1887 the financial problems of clubs became even more acute. Attendances fell in manufacturing areas and clubs struggled to maintain a programme of regular competitive football.⁷ As McGregor asserted in his famous letter of 2nd March 1888: 'Every year it is becoming more and more difficult for clubs of any standing to meet their friendly engagements and even arrange friendly matches. The consequence is that at the last moment... clubs are compelled to take on teams who will not attract the public'.⁸ For McGregor's Aston Villa and other clubs this situation had become administratively and financially intolerable.

The solution to these problems - the system of a fixed programme of home and away matches - was certainly not a new one in 1888. It was widely believed that the idea was taken from American baseball, although McGregor himself claimed that the inspiration had come from cricket's County Championship. Even so, cricket provided the inspiration rather than the model, as home and away fixtures for the counties were not compulsory and McGregor wanted 'a more definite plan of all playing against one another'.⁹ Moreover, the journalist and editor of *Athletic News*, James Catton, asserted at a later date that the League had more modest antecedents in local football competitions such as the Scarborough Wednesday League (1881) and the Glossop and District Amateur League (1887). It certainly appears that leading sporting newspapers, like *Athletic News* and the *Sunday Chronicle*, were advocating the use of the system in professional football some time before March 1888.¹⁰ It is likely therefore that most of those clubs whom McGregor circularised in March, and

⁶ Tischler, *Footballers and Businessmen*, p. 58; *Athletic News*, 6 January 1908.

⁷ Tischler, *Footballers and Businessmen*, pp. 57-58.

⁸ Sutcliffe *et al.*, *Football League*, p. 2.

⁹ See McGregor's comments at the League's 'Coming of Age' Banquet, reported in *Athletic News*, 14 June 1909.

¹⁰ *Athletic News*, 12 February 1906. This information comes from Catton's review of McGregor's 'Origin and Future' article in Gibson and Pickford, *Association Football*, written under his pen-name 'Tityrus'.

subsequently attended meetings throughout the spring and summer, were already familiar with the broad outlines and principles of the league system.

An examination of the League's first set of rules indicates the fairly limited objectives of McGregor and the original twelve clubs. Above all, the League's significance rested on the structure of its programme or the concept of 'fixity of fixtures'. This, as the *Birmingham Post* acknowledged in retrospect, was 'the ruling idea of the scheme'.¹¹ Member clubs agreed to 'support each other, and bind themselves to carry out in the strictest sense the arrangement for matches made between them, and not allow them to be cancelled on account of any cup competition or other matches'.¹² In addition, each club was expected to 'play its full strength in all matches' and to ensure punctual kick-off times; the latter to avoid circumstances common before 1888 when 'games started 30, 40 and even 60 minutes late, often after intending spectators had returned home'.¹³ Writing in 1901, John Lewis, a director of Blackburn Rovers at the time of the League's creation and now a League vice-president, re-asserted these three aims as the foundation of the League system.¹⁴ League rules also provided details of administrative structure and procedure, including the system of club representation, and the duties and responsibilities of the General Committee and the Management Committee. However, apart from the acknowledgement that matches 'shall be played under the rules of the Football Association' no reference was made to the League's position *vis-à-vis* the FA or any other body.¹⁵ For those involved in its establishment, it would seem that the League was primarily perceived as a system of competition rather than an administrative or governing body, although the latter was a necessary corollary of the former. According to Charles Sutcliffe, a former Burnley director and prominent Management Committee member: 'The League at its inception was merely a system. It produced arrangement, reliability, and competition, out of chaos, unreliability, and mere exhibition'.¹⁶

¹¹ McGregor's Obituary in *Birmingham Post*, 21 December 1911.

¹² Quoted in Tischler, *Footballers and Businessmen*, p. 59.

¹³ Sutcliffe *et al.*, *Football League*, pp. 1, 3, 5.

¹⁴ *Athletic News*, 23 December 1901.

¹⁵ Sutcliffe *et al.*, *Football League*, pp. 4-5.

¹⁶ *Athletic News*, 11 January 1909.

A further implicit aim of the League was, of course, to stimulate gate revenue. As well as being the most prominent clubs, the original twelve members were also among the best supported. It has been suggested that Everton, for example, a relatively modest club in terms of cup success, were selected entirely because of their large home attendances.¹⁷ However, this point should not be taken too far. Although good gates were clearly an important factor in the selection of clubs, it was assumed that the system, rather than the clubs themselves, would assure these. The initial selection procedure was certainly more *ad hoc* than might be supposed; based on existing networks of contact between clubs and club officials rather than a systematic analysis of gate receipts. Furthermore, it was not altogether clear beforehand that the proposed League would be a financial success. Both Sheffield clubs, for example, opposed the scheme because they believed it would be too costly for those clubs involved.¹⁸ Only with hindsight did both the press and aspiring clubs generally acknowledge the financial benefits which League membership conferred.¹⁹ For the founder members the impact of the League on gate receipts was certainly dramatic. Wolverhampton Wanderers took just £821 at the gate in their last non-League season but by 1893/94 this had increased to £3,356; Blackburn Rovers' receipts similarly rose from £1,424 in 1887/88 to £5,190 by 1901/02. As Catton noted, the establishment of the Football League 'galvanised the dry bones of club football into life and endowed the game'.²⁰

2. The External Relations of the League

The most significant football organisations in relation to the League were the FA, the Players' Union and rival leagues, principally the Southern League. We shall not dwell on the League's relations with the governing body, which have been allocated a separate chapter (chapter 3), except to say that the FA's hegemony over professional football in England became more theoretical than real as the League grew in status

¹⁷ McGregor, 'The League', p. 173; Percy M. Young, *Football on Merseyside*, London, 1963, p. 29. Only three of the founder members - Aston Villa, Blackburn Rovers and West Bromwich Albion - had won the FA Cup prior to 1888.

¹⁸ Sutcliffe *et al.*, *Football League*, p. 2; Percy M. Young, *Football in Sheffield*, London, 1964, p. 57; Churchill, *English League Football*, p. 16.

¹⁹ For press reactions on the League's inaugural season, see Tischler, *Footballers and Businessmen*, p. 59.

²⁰ William McGregor, 'The *£. s. d.* of Football' in *Book of Football*, p. 62; Catton Folders, E-F, Notes for a speech on 'The Football League', undated, p. 500c.

and power. For this reason, it is more accurate to conceptualise the two during much of the period in question as parallel bodies rather than as a dominant governing authority in control of a subservient sporting competition. The other two bodies will also receive detailed attention in subsequent chapters but it is important at this stage to briefly outline their connections and relations with the League.

While the FA, as we shall see later, could be regarded as both a partner and a rival, players' organisations were generally perceived by the League as a threat. This was hardly surprising as any attempt to improve the employment conditions of professional footballers inevitably implied the alteration of League rules. The first contact between the League and the Players' Union came in 1898 when the Union's secretary devised a new transfer scheme but, antagonised by the Union's preference for dealing with the FA, the League Management Committee refused to enter into debate.²¹ By the end of 1907 a reconstructed Association Football Players' Union²² had been formed to provide legal aid and assistance, to help necessitous members financially and to find employment for transfer-listed or disengaged players. The Union's primary objective, however, was 'the abolition of all monetary restrictions' and it was this aspect of its activities, rather than its benevolent work, which ultimately brought it into conflict with the League.²³ At first the League seems to have accepted the Union without any hostility: in fact, both John Cameron and John McKenna of the League Management Committee were among several club directors who initially accepted Union vice-presidencies while Cameron assisted in the organisation of a match for the Union's benevolent fund between Manchester United and his own club Newcastle United.²⁴ The situation had changed, however, by 1909, when the Union's confrontation with the FA over a number of issues - including the former's recourse to court action in its disputes with clubs over arrears of wages and

²¹ Sutcliffe, *et al.*, *Football League*, p. 115; John Harding, *For the Good of the Game*, London, 1991, pp. 15-24.

²² The 1898 body had been called the Association Footballers' Union, while Billy Meredith, one of the founders, had originally preferred the title Players' Union and Benefit Society for the 1907 body but this was soon changed. In 1919 the name was altered to the Association Football Players' and Trainers' Union and in 1958 it became the Professional Footballers' Association. Harding, *Good of the Game*, pp. 11, 46; Vamplew, *Pay Up*, p. 356.

²³ Harding, *Good of the Game*, p. 46; Minutes of Association Football Players' Union (henceforth AFPU), 14 May 1908.

²⁴ Minutes of AFPU, 27 January, 29 April 1908.

Workmen's Compensation claims as well as its affiliation with the General Federation of Trade Unions - and the subsequent proposed players' strike led to serious League criticism of the 'manner and policy' of the Union.²⁵ In 1912 the League clashed with the Union more directly after the Union's secretary, Syd Owen, was accused of misleading the League Management Committee over a proposed benefit match. Owen then publicly attacked the 'honour and honesty of the Football League Management Committee' and the League responded by refusing to recognise him as a Union representative.²⁶ The mutual antagonism continued until the League Management Committee declared in 1915 that past experience had shown the management and policy of the Union to be a hindrance to the clubs and governing bodies: indeed, they could 'never imagine the Union being of any practical service to the game'.²⁷

Relations improved slightly in the years immediately following the war, particularly in 1920 when the League agreed to extend the maximum wage to £9 per week (£468 a year) and allow talent money of £2 for a win and £1 for a draw in League and Cup matches.²⁸ Yet only two years later wages were cut again to £8 a week maximum in the playing season and £6 in the summer. One delegate at the Union extraordinary general meeting to discuss the subject believed that the League's intention 'was not so much to take the players' wages, as to attempt to smash the Union... the League thought the Union was getting too strong'.²⁹ From the mid-1920s, however, the Union's membership fell significantly and the executive drew back from its twin attack on the retain and transfer system and the maximum wage. In fact, negotiations between the League and the Union had almost reached a complete standstill: throughout the late 1920s and 1930s the Management Committee rejected numerous requests to meet a Union deputation to discuss the alteration of League rules (see chapter 6). Not until 1938 did the League finally consent to a meeting in order 'to

²⁵ Braham Dabscheck, "A Man or a Puppet?": The Football Association's 1909 Attempt to Destroy the Association Football Players' Union', *IJHS*, 8, 2, 1991, pp. 221-38; Sutcliffe, *et al.*, *Football League*, p. 118.

²⁶ Minutes of Football League, 22, 23 October, 15 November 1912; Minutes of AFPU, 28 October 1912.

²⁷ Sutcliffe, *et al.*, *Football League*, p. 122.

²⁸ Minutes of Association Football Players' and Trainers' Union (henceforth AFPTU), 23 February and 29 March 1920. The scheme essentially regulated wages by means of a sliding scale: the maximum for new players was fixed at £5 per week with annual rises of £1 per week to the maximum of £9 per week.

²⁹ Minutes of AFPTU, 23 April and 7 May 1922 (EGM).

hear the case of the players' but, even then, the League refused the Union's demands completely. Yet the Union stayed resolute and, with the strength of its largest membership since 1920 behind it, met the League the following year with a more bold and comprehensive set of requests. On this occasion it was only the outbreak of war which prevented a major confrontation as the Union promised 'drastic action', presumably a players' strike, after their demands had once again been turned down at the League annual general meeting.³⁰

The League also faced Union opposition to its rules and procedures in the law courts. The most significant example of this was the Kingaby case of 1912, in which the Union, with FA and League sanction, tested the legality of the retain and transfer system. Although the action was formally taken against Aston Villa it was generally recognised as a case against the League itself: the latter agreed to instruct the club in its defence and indemnify it against all costs.³¹ The decision that Villa had no case to answer, and hence that the transfer system was legal, had major implications for both sides. For the League it was seen as a vindication of their rules and an important victory over the Union: had they lost, it was thought they 'would have been at the mercy of the Players' Union. The League could not afford to be dictated to by any organisation'. Meanwhile, the heavy legal costs effectively crippled the Union financially for over a decade and prevented any further legal cases against the League for some time.³² While the cornerstones of the League system - the retain and transfer system and the maximum wage - remained intact despite much criticism, the League did suffer a considerable legal defeat in the Leddy case of 1923. The context of the case was the League's wage reductions of 1922 which forced many clubs to alter existing contracts with their players (see chapter 5). The Union considered Henry Leddy's action against Chesterfield as an opportunity 'to contest the right of the club or the Football League to break [a player's] contract under the common law of the

³⁰ Minutes of AFPTU, 28 February, 20 April and 22 August 1938 (AGM); 13 March (EGM) and 26 March 1939; Dabscheck, "Defensive Manchester": a History of the Professional Footballers Association' in Richard Cashman and Michael McKernan (eds), *Sport in History*, St. Lucia, 1979, p. 246; Harding, *Good of the Game*, p. 202-03.

³¹ Minutes of Aston Villa FC, 11 October 1910.

³² Minutes of Aston Villa FC, 2 April 1912; Minutes of Football League, 3 June 1912 (AGM); Minutes of AFPU, 8 January and 1 April 1912; Minutes of AFPTU, 19 January 1920. It was not until August 1920 that the Union finally paid off all its costs to the League. Minutes of AFPTU, 23 August 1920 (AGM).

land'.³³ The success of the Leddy case, after an appeal, has been seen by one historian as a major turning point in the Union's fortunes, by safeguarding the legal rights of players and preventing the League from acting with 'total impunity'.³⁴

The most important point of contact between the Football League and the Union, especially after the Great War, was probably over the question of compensation for injury. The machinery for dealing with cases brought by players against clubs under the Workman's Compensation Acts in this context had been established in 1912 with the foundation of the Football League Mutual Insurance Federation.³⁵ At first, however, the process was haphazard and inconsistent as clubs were not compelled to join the Federation and the Union had not established itself as the main channel for claimants. Yet over time the two bodies developed a more formal series of procedures for settling cases. This was based above all on the personal communication between the Federation's solicitor, the ubiquitous Charles Sutcliffe, and his Union counterpart Thomas Hinchcliffe. Generally the intention of the Union was to persuade the Federation first to admit liability for the injury and then, in place of the payment of weekly compensation, to make the player a lump sum settlement. If agreement could not be reached then the dispute moved to litigation, although this was rare as the Federation generally favoured out of court settlements.³⁶ By 1925 Sutcliffe and Hinchcliffe were corresponding and meeting on a regular basis to discuss compensation cases; this at a time when the League and the Union were further apart than ever over the fundamental issues of wages and transfers. The number of cases dealt with by the Federation increased steadily over the next decade or so. Indeed by the late 1930s the Federation was apparently considering over sixty claims each season and paying out nearly £15,000 in weekly compensation and lump sum settlements.³⁷

³³ Harding, *Good of the Game*, pp. 149-50; Minutes of AFPTU, 18 September 1922.

³⁴ Harding, *Good of the Game*, p. 154.

³⁵ This was preceded in 1907 by a joint body, the Football Mutual Insurance Federation, consisting of representatives of the Football League, the Scottish League and the Southern League.

³⁶ See, for example, Minutes of AFPTU, Paterson v. Oldham Athletic, 20 August 1923 (AGM); Gough v. Sheffield United, 15 October 1923; Kilborn v. Bradford City, 24 August 1924 (AGM).

³⁷ Minutes of AFPTU, 28 September 1925; Sutcliffe, *et al.*, *Football League*, p. 129. It is not entirely clear how this figure was reached as the Union's own records suggest substantially smaller amounts (see chapter 6).

If its relations with the Players' Union were business-like but distant, the Football League was, not surprisingly, even more aloof in regard to other leagues. Its formation in 1888 led not only to numerous imitators but also to some serious competitors: the Football Alliance was established later the same year; the Midland, Northern and Lancashire Leagues a year later; while the Western League took form in 1892 and the Southern League in 1894. The Irish and Scots created their own national leagues in 1890. There is little doubt, however, that the Football League was widely regarded as the foremost of these competitions and the ultimate goal of any aspiring professional club.³⁸ In 1892 the League was extended to two divisions in order to accommodate the election *en bloc* of the Alliance while other leading clubs were regularly elected on an individual basis from rival leagues.

The most serious problem the League had with non-League clubs at this stage was the poaching of its players. To counteract this the League attempted in 1890 to blacklist the guilty clubs, thus preventing their arrangement of fixtures with League clubs. This ban remained in force until 1896 although the FA successfully convinced the League to withdraw it for cup-ties. In the meantime the League had agreed with the Football Alliance and the Northern League to limit signing-on bonuses to £10 and to expel any club found guilty of paying more.³⁹ This policy of seeking agreement rather than confrontation proved successful over the following years as the League made arrangements with its competitors over the registration and transfer of players. Undoubtedly the most important agreement was that with the Scottish Football League in 1897 which not only stopped future misunderstandings by making retain and transfer lists binding in both countries but also, through the creation of the International League Board (or the Inter-League Board), provided the machinery to 'co-ordinate matters of mutual interest' between the two. Each League appointed four representatives to the Board whilst the presidency was to alternate between the two yearly.⁴⁰ This agreement proved crucial for the League on at least two subsequent

³⁸ See Vamplew, *Pay Up*, p. 136. For an alternative view, see Patrick Murphy, John Williams and Eric Dunning, *Football on Trial: Spectator Violence and Development in the Football World*, London, 1990, p. 45.

³⁹ Vamplew, *Pay Up*, p. 136; Sutcliffe, *et al.*, *Football League*, p. 8.

⁴⁰ The quotation is from Inglis, *League Football*, p. 43. A similar agreement was reached with the Irish League in 1914 and the formation of the Anglo-Irish Football League Board. Its rules and bye-laws

occasions: first in 1899 over its transfer dispute with the FA and then, in 1912, when the Scottish League supported it over the Kingaby case.⁴¹

Good relations with other leagues were also facilitated through the organisation of Inter-League representative matches. While the main objective of these games was to generate additional revenue for administrative purposes they also had an obvious social function. The annual Board meeting was arranged for the eve of the match and a luncheon, to which representatives of clubs and the respective national associations were invited, generally took place prior to each match.⁴² The first Inter-League match was in 1891 against a team representing the Football Alliance. The following year the League played the Scottish League in what became an annual sporting and social event and, by 1894, the Irish League was also offered a match. The Southern League, however, only began competing against the League team in 1911, after the two bodies had finally reached agreement over registrations and transfers.⁴³

By 1900 the Southern League was the only serious rival to the Football League in England. Yet over the next twenty years this rivalry was characterised for the most part by mutual distrust and hostility. From early on the Southern League had made clear signals of its desire to amalgamate with the League although subsequent attempts to convince the League to accept it as a regional second division in 1907 and 1909 were easily defeated. The League Management Committee relented later in 1909, by devising its own scheme for the incorporation of the Southern League as a third division, but the clubs voted against this as well.⁴⁴ The Management Committee now appeared willing to work with the Southern League and hence, at the beginning of 1910, the two bodies entered into agreement and formed the English League Board to deal with any disputes which might arise. Again the bye-laws of the Board allowed

were similar to those of the Inter-League Board, except that two representatives, rather than four, were appointed from each League. Football League Handbook, 1915/16, p. 59.

⁴¹ Football League Handbook 1899-1900, p. 25; Sutcliffe, *et al.*, *Football League*, pp. 116, 135; *Athletic News*, 10 April 1916. The Scottish League contributed £150 towards the cost of the Kingaby case.

⁴² For examples, *Athletic News*, 23 October 1911; Minutes of West Ham United FC, 28 October 1930.

⁴³ Sutcliffe, *et al.*, *Football League*, p. 133; Paul Harrison, *Southern League Football: The First Fifty Years*, Gravesend, 1989, p. 60.

⁴⁴ The reasons for this refusal by the League clubs and the whole debate around the idea of a national league will be discussed at greater length in the next chapter.

for the mutual recognition of players' registrations although, by contrast with the Inter-League Board, the subordinate position of the Southern League was formally recognised in the composition of the Board itself. The League was entitled to appoint the president and three other representatives while the Southern League was restricted to three.⁴⁵

On the surface relations between the two leagues seemed closer than ever. Inter-League matches were arranged, while for the first time joint meetings and consultation took place over Players' Union demands. But the underlying bitterness reappeared in 1911 when the League became involved in a revived proposal for a third division, to include a number of Southern League clubs, without prior consultation with, or approval from, its southern counterpart. The proposal again failed but not before the Southern League had declared it to be 'an unfriendly act'.⁴⁶ The war period was a critical phase in the respective fortunes of the two leagues. While the League had organized a series of relatively successful regional competitions and secured the loyalty of its members, the Southern League had rarely met and played no part in the administration of the London Combination. Many of the Southern League's more ambitious clubs thus inevitably looked to the Football League as a way out. The Southern League, however, was not prepared to suffer any further losses to its status and hence, following West Ham's election to the League in March 1919, it refused to allow either the players of West Ham, or those of other former members Stoke and Coventry City, to be registered with the League. Furthermore, it informed the League of its decision to withdraw from the 1910 agreement.⁴⁷ Yet by 1920 this rift hardly mattered as most of the clubs and administrators of the Southern League had become convinced that their future lay with the League. There was therefore only minimal opposition to Sutcliffe's plan to admit the first division of the Southern League as a League third division southern section. From this point on the Southern League ceased to be a rival to the Football League and became merely a secondary competition.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Football League Handbook 1910/11, pp. 42-45.

⁴⁶ Report of Southern League AGM in *Athletic News*, 19 June 1911.

⁴⁷ *Athletic News*, June to August 1919, *passim*.; Minutes of West Ham United FC, 17 March 1919.

⁴⁸ Minutes of Football League, 31 May 1920 (AGM); Report of Football League AGM in *Athletic News*, 7 June 1920.

3. The Administrative Structure of the League

The two main actors within the decision-making environment were the member clubs, under the collective guise of the General Committee, and the Management Committee. Although the relationship certainly changed over time it is possible to identify a broad distinction of duties and responsibilities. The first official set of rules defined the system of control clearly. The central legislative body, the General Committee, consisted of one representative of each club who, in turn, elected the chairman, treasurer, secretary and Management Committee. The latter was given the task of appointing match officials, dealing with infringements of League rules and, more generally, conducting 'the business of the League'.⁴⁹ So the Management Committee acted as executive and judiciary to the General Committee's legislature. Yet initially, at least, the activities of the Management Committee were rather haphazard and its relationship with the clubs confused. In particular, clubs seemed reluctant to distance themselves from direct control over the management of the League, regularly calling general meetings to discuss minor issues and individual breaches of rule. For example, during the League's second season the question of fog-affected matches was believed to be 'of too important a character to be considered by the Management Committee' and left over for the clubs to decide. The conduct of players on the pitch was also initially dealt with by an unwieldy conference of all member clubs, though this did not last long.⁵⁰

Nevertheless, by the start of our period the fundamental division of authority within the League structure was widely acknowledged: while the clubs made the rules, the Management Committee administered them. Any suggestion that the latter should take the initiative in framing or altering rules was strongly rebuffed.⁵¹ In practice, however, as the status of the Management Committee improved and the clubs grew

⁴⁹ Quoted in Sutcliffe, *et al.*, *Football League*, pp. 4-5. Much of the following is drawn from this work and the Football League Rules and Handbooks.

⁵⁰ Quoted in Sutcliffe, *et al.*, *Football League*, pp. 6-7; Green, *Football Association*, pp. 398-99.

⁵¹ For expressions of this opinion see Reports of Football League AGMs in *Athletic News*, 6 June 1904, 5 June 1905 and *Athletic News*, 6 March 1911. At the 1902 AGM almost all the proposals emanating from the Management Committee were vetoed. Report of Football League AGM in *Athletic News*, 2 June 1902.

confident enough to delegate certain powers, so the Committee became more influential in rule-making. Indeed by about 1910 it would appear that the Management Committee had become the leading figure in this area, and that any revision of League rules required either its support or sanction. At the 1912 annual meeting, for instance, the Committee's recommendations for the payment of compensation for postponed matches were carried ahead of counter-proposals from Hull City and Middlesbrough. Proposals brought forward by clubs independently - such as Derby County's regular attempts to increase the number of relegated and promoted clubs from two to four and Arsenal's proposals for a limit on transfer fees in the 1920s - were invariably defeated, as they were perceived as lacking official approval.⁵² Until the 1930s the Management Committee's legislative role was legitimised by convention rather than any constitutional right. Only retrospectively was it formally given the discretion 'to submit any alteration of Rule thought desirable'.⁵³

The most important event in the legislative calendar was the annual general meeting, held in May or June each year in London, generally during the same week as the FA annual meeting. As with any limited company⁵⁴, it involved the presentation of the balance sheet and the annual report to the member clubs (i.e. the shareholders). More importantly, it was also the occasion for the election of clubs and officials and the alteration or addition of rules. The election process for clubs and officials will be discussed in chapter 2, but as regards rules, it is clear that the system tended towards conservatism. This was not least because changes in the League's constitution or rules required a three-quarters majority. John Lewis complained in 1902 that this precluded experimentation as 'at most annual meetings of the League the majority of proposals fall to the ground'.⁵⁵ It has already been noted that representation and voting were initially based on fairly egalitarian principles. Until 1920 clubs in all

⁵² Minutes of Football League, 3 June 1912 (AGM); 28 May 1923; Reports of Football League AGMs in *Athletic News*, 10 June 1912; 4 June 1923, 9 June 1924.

⁵³ Football League Handbook, 1937/38, Rule 80.

⁵⁴ The Football League was converted into a limited liability company in May 1904.

⁵⁵ *Athletic News*, 2 June 1902. 'Tityrus' (James Catton) similarly accused the League at its 1904 AGM of pursuing 'a policy of do-nothing'. 'No corporate body that I have ever known can demolish an agenda paper with such efficiency, neatness and despatch, and no society... can resolutely set a face against all change, and negative all proposals...'. Report of Football League AGM in *Athletic News*, 6 June 1904.

divisions were entitled to attend and vote at any League meeting but the newly formed third division northern and southern sections were only bestowed the status of associate members, without voting rights or automatic representation at meetings. Not until 1929 were they given even minimal representation, and then only two votes per section.

As we have seen, the Management Committee was effectively the executive body of the League. The original Committee was made up of just five members, including a chairman, secretary and treasurer, but by 1893 it had been reorganised to consist of a president, two vice-presidents and a general committee of four. At this point each division was represented by two Committee members, and separate meetings of the divisional bodies were held, but in 1909 the divisional distinction was abolished and club representation as a whole was extended to six. In addition, William McGregor had become a Life Member of the League in 1902, with the power to attend and vote at Management Committee meetings. Following McGregor's death in 1911, former president John Bentley took a similar position until he too died in 1918, after which the Committee reverted to nine permanent members. Until 1917 the Committee was elected annually but thereafter half the members and the senior vice-president were elected together with the president one year, and the other half with the junior vice-president the next. This certainly ensured a great deal of continuity in the Committee's personnel - a situation aided by the fact that there were no restrictions on the time a member could spend on the Committee, despite a proposal by West Bromwich Albion that a Committeeman should hold office for only two years. Indeed it appears that death and retirement were the major vehicles for change, as clubs rarely opted to vote members off the Committee. This only happened to six members in this period, two of whom regained their places within a year. Some Committeemen kept their places for over thirty years, even after they had ceased to be actively connected with their clubs.⁵⁶ What is more, for much of the period, especially between the wars, the League was dominated by elderly members with long careers as voluntary Committeemen and officials in local and national football associations. It was considered particularly fitting, for instance, that Arthur Dickinson should die only half

⁵⁶ See Sutcliffe, *et al.*, *Football League*, chapter 9.

an hour before a Management Committee meeting after twenty years on the executive. As the League's own memorial noted: 'Mr. Dickinson could be said to have grown up with the League; he had spent a lifetime in the game and grown old in its service.'⁵⁷ In this sense, the Football League fitted closely with Fishwick's description of junior football administration as 'a form of middle-class gerontocracy'.⁵⁸

The executive was thus an extremely conservative body in terms of its structure and personnel. Committee members were expected to be loyal to the League in preference to the wishes of their clubs or other associations. When this position of neutrality was compromised, or a member became involved in a potential scandal, it was assumed that they would resign immediately. It was surely no coincidence, for instance, that in 1910 Bentley offered his resignation as president (as well as FA vice-president) shortly after his position at Manchester United, and the club's general finances, had been subjected to an investigation by the governing body.⁵⁹ At that year's annual meeting he noted that there was 'considerably more opposition than usual' to his presidency and cited the influence of medical problems 'and other things' for his decision to retire.⁶⁰ Likewise in 1927 when Arsenal were fined for breaches of League and FA rules, and chairman Sir. Henry Norris suspended for financial irregularities, William Hall, Norris' right-hand man and the club's representative on the Management Committee, resigned his place immediately.⁶¹ It was crucial to the executive that it should be seen as an independent and respectable body of administrators whose hands had not been sullied by any serious involvement in rule-breaking.

Under the League's written rules and by convention the Management Committee enjoyed a fairly broad scope of control and a wide range of functions. The Committee's prescribed duties remained markedly similar throughout the period: to

⁵⁷ Minutes of Football League, 5 November 1930.

⁵⁸ Fishwick, *English Football*, pp. 17-18.

⁵⁹ FA Report and Recommendation of the Commission Adopted by the Council, re. Manchester United FC, 30 March 1910; Minutes of FA Council, 22 April 1910.

⁶⁰ Report of Football League AGM in *Athletic News*, 20 June 1910. The 'other things' almost certainly also included his decision to support the deletion of the maximum wage rule at the previous FA annual meeting, for which he was publicly criticised by Preston's Tom Houghton. Report of FA AGM in *Athletic News*, 14 June 1909.

⁶¹ Minutes of Football League, 13 September 1927.

govern and conduct the business of the League and deal 'as they may think fit' with offences or any matters not specified in the rules.⁶² In practice, these functions fell into five main categories. Firstly, the Committee penalised clubs and players for breaching League rules. Clubs could be fined for anything from minor infringements like failure to return forms or late payment of the League levy to more serious matters such as late kick-offs, fielding weak teams or illegal payments to players. Likewise players were suspended for breaking their agreements through insubordination, betting, breaching training rules and the like.⁶³ Secondly, it arbitrated in disputes both among member clubs and between clubs and players. In fact, certain meetings were set aside specifically to deal with such problems, prompting Bentley to observe that in such cases the Committee was transformed into something akin to a County Court.⁶⁴ Dissatisfied parties could also appeal against the Committee's decision to the Board of Appeal, an independent body consisting of three FA Councillors. Thirdly, as previously mentioned, the Committee gradually became involved in drafting new rules, altering existing ones and, through circulars to its members, obtaining a collective League opinion on important legislative matters without calling a general meeting. Linked to this, the Committee also had an important advisory role. As well as providing guidance on fundamental issues of policy the Committee was expected to advise clubs privately on individual matters relating, for example, to players' agreements, the insurance of players or the use of grounds for non-football related activities.⁶⁵ Finally, the Committee acted for its member clubs in negotiations at a wider level. This included not only a mandate to reach agreement with other football associations and leagues but also to lobby railway companies, tax officials and even

⁶² For examples and comparisons, see Football League Handbook 1890/91, Rules 2 and 6; Handbook 1900-01, Rules 3 and 11; Handbook 1910/11, Rules 3 and 12; Handbook 1919/20, Rules 2 and 12; Handbook 1937/38, Rule 15.

⁶³ See Minutes of Football League, 10 May 1912; Green, *Football Association*, p. 400. In contrast with the Northern Union, the practice of deducting points from clubs for offences was never seriously entertained after Notts County forced the Committee to remit a point deducted from them for fielding an unregistered player in 1899. The most severe punishment - expulsion from the League - occurred in just the unique case of Leeds City in 1919, whose offence was to frustrate a joint League-FA inquiry by refusing to hand over key documents (see chapter 4). Sutcliffe, *et al.*, *Football League*, p. 6; Paul Greenhalgh, "'The Work and Play Principle': The Professional Regulations of the Northern Rugby Football Union, 1898-1905", *IJHS*, 9, 3, 1992, pp. 364-69.

⁶⁴ *Athletic News*, 29 April 1901.

⁶⁵ For examples, see Minutes of Aston Villa FC, 7 September 1912; Minutes of Football League, 9 August 1912; 3, 24 February 1913; Minutes of West Ham United FC, 28 February, 5 March 1928.

government departments in order to secure the best possible terms and conditions for its members.⁶⁶

The Management Committee's work was supported by the creation of a number of sub-committees. Although certainly not as influential as those of the MCC, the League's sub-committees nevertheless proved vital in easing the executive's workload and dealing at greater depth with complex policy issues.⁶⁷ Most salient were the permanent sub-committees, especially those concerned with the activities of the various joint-boards connected with other leagues or with auxiliary bodies like the insurance federations (see Table 1.1). Much less is known of the activities of the Finance Committee, though the fact that it consisted mainly of junior members of the Management Committee seems to suggest that it was afforded fairly low status. Sub-committees were also set up from time to time to handle those matters which were proving too burdensome for the Committee. Thus, for example, special sub-committees dealt with appeals by players for transfer fee reductions and adjudicated on the share of transfer fee paid to the player. Moreover, a sub-committee was even formed in 1920 to prioritise and filter business for Management Committee meetings.⁶⁸ Finally, the Committee appointed a number of *ad hoc* sub-committees to consider specific issues. Hence in August 1912 a sub-committee of McKenna, Bentley and Sutcliffe was set up to look into the question of insuring players under the National Health Insurance Act. After interviewing the Health Commissioners it reported to the whole Committee in early September and was subsequently wound up.⁶⁹ In addition, temporary sub-committees were frequently established to carry out inquiries into alleged offences or irregularities at particular clubs or involving certain players.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ See *Athletic News*, 17 April 1917, 14 March 1921; Catton Folders, A-B, Letter from Fred Rinder to James Catton, 6 October 1919, p. 36.

⁶⁷ James Bradley, 'The MCC', p. 30.

⁶⁸ Mason, *Association Football*, p. 105; *Athletic News*, 6 March 1911; Inglis, *League Football*, p. 123.

⁶⁹ Minutes of Football League, 9 August and 9 September 1912; *Athletic News*, 2 September 1912.

⁷⁰ For example, a sub-committee of Sutcliffe, Lewis and Tom Harris was established to look into 'the managerial workings of the Chelsea club' in 1912. After two to three months scrutinising deeds and documents it concluded that there were no breaches of League rules and the 'club is worked in a thorough business-like manner'. Minutes of Football League, 22-23 October 1912; Catton Folders, B-C, League Report on Chelsea FC, 28 October 1912, p. 243.

Table 1.1 Permanent Sub-Committees of the Football League, 1888-1939.

Name	Years in existence	No. of members
International Football League Board	1898-	4
English Football League Board	1909-19	4
Finance Committee	1912-19	3
	1919-26	4
	1926-	5
Football Mutual Insurance Federation	1912-14	3
	1914-20	2
Football League Mutual Insurance Federation	1914-23	5
	1923-	9
Anglo-Irish League Board	1914-	2
National Footballers' War Fund	1918-	5

Source: Football League Handbooks, 1888-1939; Minutes of Football League.

The highest and most prestigious office in the Football League was that of president. Initially the position carried little formal authority. Only in 1893 was the president, previously known as the chairman, given the right to vote at all meetings and *ex-officio* membership of all committees. As in many such organisations, however, authority derived as much from force of personality and length of tenure as from any prescribed duties. As Table 1.2 indicates, the presidents in this period remained in office for a considerable time, on average over eleven years each. In fact, the president was generally elected unopposed and rarely faced a challenge at annual general meetings. When George Leavey of Arsenal was nominated to challenge Bentley in 1904 it was viewed by League representatives and the press as an act of disloyalty. He was convincingly beaten by thirty-three votes to four and lost his place on the Management Committee.⁷¹ In contrast with the MCC, whose president could hold office for only one year, the League presidency was conceived as a long-term, even permanent, position. In 1931 John McKenna was persuaded by a 'strong appeal' from the member clubs to continue as president following his decision to stand down after 21 years in the post; in the event, he remained as president until his death five

⁷¹ Leavey subsequently argued that his nomination was 'not intended seriously' and that he had intended to withdraw it at the AGM but had been unable to do so. In a letter to *Athletic News* he suggested that 'the bare idea of any member of our committee opposing the re-election of our president [was] altogether too absurd for one moment's consideration'. *Athletic News*, 13 June 1904.

years later.⁷² Stability and continuity were clearly prized here above any aspirations for open democracy. Moreover, the president was expected to be active in the formulation of policy and the general running of the League. McKenna, for instance, was a member of all but one of the permanent sub-committees as well as being honorary treasurer from 1912. During the war he also chaired the sub-committee of the Lancashire Section and was instrumental in organising the Relief Fund for clubs in addition to his regular duties.⁷³ This is not to say that the president was necessarily an autocratic or even a dominant figure. Certainly, by contrast with the control allegedly exercised by Charles Clegg over the FA Council, the League president's powers appear relatively limited.⁷⁴

Table 1.2 Presidents and Secretaries of the Football League 1888-1939

	President	Club		Secretary
1892-94	William McGregor	Aston Villa	1888-1902	Harry Lockett
1894-1910	John Bentley	Bolton Wanderers and Manchester United		Harry Lockett
	John Bentley		1902-33	Tom Charnley
1910-36	John McKenna	Liverpool		Tom Charnley
	John McKenna		1933-56	Fred Howarth
1936-39	Charles Sutcliffe	(Burnley)		Fred Howarth
1939-49	William Cuff	Everton		Fred Howarth

Note: Club in brackets indicates that the president had ceased formal administrative links.

The president also played an important role as spokesman and figurehead of the Football League. At official dinners, banquets and luncheons the president represented, and effectively spoke for, the League as a whole. He was expected to attend on behalf of the League both the celebrations of championship and cup winners and the funerals of leading figures and associates in the football world. Indeed, ceremonial duties were perhaps the most time-consuming part of the president's work.

⁷² Bradley, 'The MCC', p. 28; Minutes of Football League Shareholders' Meeting (First and Second Divisions), 6 March 1931; Report of Football League AGM in *Athletic News*, 8 June 1931.

⁷³ Football League Handbooks, 1910-36.

⁷⁴ Clegg was chairman of the FA from 1890 to 1937 while in 1923 he also became FA president (effectively an honorary position). In 1907 William Bellamy, the FA representative for Lincolnshire and one-time Management Committee member, complained that 'for some time... the work and general policy of the Association have been almost entirely in the hands of Mr. Clegg, and this is a state of affairs which I for one do not agree with. My idea of the duty of the Chairman is that he should preside at the Council meetings and not direct and govern the whole business of the Association, and there can be no denying that that is what obtains at the present time...'. Catton Folders, B-C, W. Bellamy to D. H. Woolfall, 1907, otherwise undated, p. 277.

The opening of new stands was one such duty and a regular occurrence. For example, McKenna was asked by West Ham United to formally open their new stand on 29 August 1925, but had to decline as he was engaged at Portsmouth on the same day. Two weeks later he was opening a new stand at Wolverhampton Wanderers.⁷⁵ The visit to Wolverhampton clearly indicates the symbolic importance attached to the presidency. McKenna and two Management Committee colleagues were invited to an official luncheon and greeted with a scoreboard display announcing 'A Hearty Welcome to our President and all the League officials'. The club programme joined the celebrations by declaring that 'the opening of the stand has been associated with a ceremony such as most Clubs crave for but few are privileged to cater for'.⁷⁶ In some respects these sentiments were akin to those normally reserved for royal visits and certainly the League president's visit served a similar function.

The secretary was at the administrative core of the League's operations. In common with those of the Management Committee and the presidency, the secretary's powers were widened as the League grew. Initially the secretary was only required to 'conduct the correspondence of the League' but by 1892 the office had been amalgamated with that of treasurer and the secretary became a paid official of the League.⁷⁷ He thus became formally responsible for the League's finances and the general supervision of administrative operations at the League's headquarters. In addition, regulations precluded him from voting at meetings or retaining any official or unofficial connections with member clubs. It was not until Tom Charnley took over as secretary in 1902, however, that the position became full-time and the League acquired a permanent office rather than being run from the secretary's private address. Indeed, Charnley's predecessor Harry Lockett had attempted to run his own printing company at the same time as being League secretary. As Inglis has revealed, this proved impossible and Lockett was forced to resign after admitting embezzling League funds to aid the expansion of his business.⁷⁸ Despite a suggestion that the

⁷⁵ Minutes of West Ham United FC, 21 and 28 July 1925; Tony Matthews (with Les Smith), *The Wolves: An Encyclopedia of Wolverhampton Wanderers Football Club, 1877-1989*, London, 1989, p. 27, although it gives the wrong date for McKenna's visit.

⁷⁶ Wolverhampton Wanderers Programme, 19 September 1925.

⁷⁷ Football League Handbook, 1890/91, Rule 14.

⁷⁸ For a detailed account of Lockett's resignation see Inglis, *League Football*, pp. 50-52.

League's headquarters should be based at Manchester, the first office was situated at Winckley Street in Charnley's native Preston. It remained here throughout our period, moving to Tithebarn Street in 1905, to Castle Chambers in 1913 and then to an address in Winckley Square in November 1926.⁷⁹

As the amount of work involved in running the day-to-day affairs of the League increased so it became necessary to enlarge the administrative staff. Clearly it was no longer possible for the secretary to run things without assistance as Lockett had done. Hence with Charnley's appointment the League took on an office worker, Harry Downs, who had been Bentley's assistant and then secretary at Bolton Wanderers. By 1920 it had become necessary to take on an assistant secretary and instead of advertising the post Charnley appointed his son-in-law Fred Howarth. Indeed, the League office in the inter-war period remained almost entirely the preserve of the Charnley-Howarth family. Tom Charnley junior, a director of Preston North End and Charnley's nephew, joined the staff in 1930 and became assistant secretary on his uncle's retirement, while Fred Howarth's nephew Eric was employed as a clerk from 1934.⁸⁰ In this context it is hardly surprising that the fourth secretary, Alan Hardaker, considered on his arrival in 1951 that the League 'had been a family business for half a century'.⁸¹

Although the secretary had no formal power to direct League policy, he could, and did, have some influence in the decision-making process. It is certainly evident that the position entailed much more than simply drafting the minutes and balancing the books. Howarth, in particular, seems to have been fairly outspoken on certain matters of policy, particularly the maximum wage, which he defended vehemently against its critics. He was also instrumental in the League's ill-fated attempt to destroy the pools companies in 1936 and in the establishment and administration of the Jubilee Fund from 1938.⁸² Moreover, as the only official involved with the League's business on a

⁷⁹ Report of Football League AGM in *Athletic News*, 2 June 1902; Preston Trade Directories, 1904, 1910, 1913, 1922, 1926, 1932 and 1940; Minutes of Football League, 5 November 1926.

⁸⁰ Inglis, *League Football*, p. 54; Fred Howarth's obituary in *Lancashire Evening Post*, 12 January 1972.

⁸¹ Alan Hardaker, *Hardaker of the League*, London, 1977, p. 36.

⁸² *Lancashire Evening Post*, 12 January 1972.

daily basis, the secretary effectively controlled the flow of information to and from the League's offices. All inquiries from clubs, players, the FA and the press were dealt with initially by him. On significant matters of policy he was instructed by the Management Committee, but the secretary was still allowed a certain amount of discretion and flexibility in issuing circulars, replying to correspondence and dealing with other matters arising between Committee meetings. In fact, as Hardaker's autobiography indicates, it was even possible for the secretary to manipulate the agenda and records of Management Committee meetings. Howarth allegedly removed from the official minutes any business, even resolutions, with which he disagreed and would also collect the members' private notes at the end of each meeting. According to this account, Howarth was able to dominate the Management Committee: 'If Fred Howarth did not like an idea it was never implemented - or even recorded'.⁸³ Of course, Hardaker's recollections are drawn from a slightly later period and it is unlikely that Howarth, or any of his predecessors, would have been allowed such control at a time when more experienced members like Sutcliffe, McKenna or John Lewis were on the Committee. Nevertheless, this evidence does support the assertion that the secretary was potentially a powerful figure in the administration of the League.

4. The Social Composition and Collective Culture of the Management Committee

Any attempt to analyse in detail the social and cultural profile of a body like the Football League Management Committee inevitably faces some significant obstacles. This is due above all to a lack of solid biographical evidence. First of all, administrators of sports like association football and rugby league were rarely included in contemporary national or local collective biographies and, in common with working-class leaders, they were not prolific memoir writers.⁸⁴ Conversely, in the sporting press they were, not surprisingly, featured purely for their activities in relation to sport, thus providing little information about their social background, business affairs or, indeed, any outside activities. In fact, some obituaries fail even to

⁸³ Hardaker, *Hardaker of the League*, p. 41. For a detailed description of the administration of the League from a much later period, but with inevitable similarities, see Chapter 5. Hardaker argues that the role of secretary in his era was really more like a 'general manager', p. 64.

⁸⁴ See Greenhalgh, 'Work and Play Principle', p. 357.

mention the occupation of the deceased.⁸⁵ Other potentially illuminating data regarding education and the father's occupation, both generally recognised as fair guides of social class and status, has similarly been difficult to uncover. Of course, the paucity of such primary source data does in itself suggest that football administrators had yet to attain the widespread social recognition and elevated status of local political leaders, town councillors and civic dignitaries.

A natural starting-point is to consider the occupations of Committeemen in the period. For this analysis occupations have been categorised according to Guy Routh's *Occupation and Pay in Great Britain, 1906-79*, which is based in turn on census classifications. Seven broad occupational classes, two of which were subdivided, were distinguished as follows: higher professional (1A); lower professional (1B); employers and proprietors (2A); managers and administrators (2B); clerical workers (3); foremen, inspectors and supervisors (4); skilled manual workers (5); semi-skilled manual workers (6); and unskilled manual workers (7).⁸⁶ Although the descriptions of the occupations of Committeemen were often vague and difficult to interpret, some conclusions can be drawn. From 1900 to 1939 inclusive, thirty-one men served on the Committee and there were four presidents. As Appendix 1 shows, membership was confined exclusively to categories 1A, 2A and 2B: higher professionals, employers and managers. More specifically, the Committee seems to have been dominated by small businessmen, local government officials and solicitors, who together made up over two-thirds of the total. Most surprising, perhaps, is the fact that manual workers and clerks, both of whom were fairly influential in the early development of professional clubs and on club directorships in general, were not represented at all on the Management Committee.⁸⁷ Large manufacturers and employers similarly appear to have been less prepared to become League Committeemen on top of being club directors, and even if they did, they rarely sought higher office as vice-president or president. Indeed, it is noticeable that none of the most prominent and wealthy club owners made any attempt to gain election on the Committee. For men like building

⁸⁵ Two examples are Walter Hart's obituaries in the *Birmingham Mail*, 5 June 1940, *Birmingham Gazette*, 6 June 1940 and Tom Houghton's obituary in the *Preston Guardian*, 21 September 1912.

⁸⁶ Guy Routh, *Occupation and Pay in Great Britain, 1906-79*, London, 1980, Appendix A.

⁸⁷ On the role of clerks see Tony Mason, *The Blues and the Reds: A history of the Liverpool and Everton Football Clubs*, Liverpool, 1985, pp. 1-2; Vamplew, *Pay Up*, p. 157.

contractor Harry Mears at Chelsea, the brewer J. H. Davies at Manchester United, the politicians Samuel Hill-Wood at Glossop and, a little later, Sir. Henry Norris at Arsenal, and the mill-owning Crowther family at Huddersfield Town, it would seem that the community prestige or psychic income to be gained from patronage of the local club could hardly be replicated by a place on the Management Committee.⁸⁸

Table 1.3 Comparison of the occupations of club directors and Football League Committee members

Occupational Category	FLMC		1st. Div		Selected	
	1900-39		1888-1914		1919-39	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Gentlemen	—	—	19	4.0	2	3.6
1A	6	20.0	{ 116	{ 24.4	7	12.7
1B	—	—	{	{	—	—
2A	15	50.0	256	53.8	27	49.1
2B	9	30.0	28	5.9	9	16.3
3	—	—	29	6.1	4	7.3
4	—	—	4	0.8	—	—
5	—	—	{ 24	{ 5.0	6	11.0
6	—	—	{	{	—	—
7	—	—	{	{	—	—
Total	30	100.0	476	100.0	55	100.0
Unknown or unspecified	1		15		6	

Sources: Adapted from Appendix 1; Tischler, *Footballers and Businessmen*, pp. 72-76; Korr, *West Ham United*, pp. 243-44; Arnold, *A Game That Would Pay*, pp. 201-02.

The work of historians on the occupational composition of club directorates provides a useful comparison. On the period before 1914, Mason, Tischler and Vamplew have all emphasised the predominance, both numerically and financially, of manufacturers, traders and those involved in commerce.⁸⁹ As it is the only analysis to deal exclusively with Football League clubs, Tischler's modified figures are shown in Table 1.3. There seems to have been little change between the wars, although no comprehensive studies of this period have been made. Local industrialists continued

⁸⁸ Mason, *Association Football*, pp. 45-48; Tischler, *Footballers and Businessmen*, p. 74. On 'psychic income' see Daryl Adair, 'Psychic Income and the Administration of English County Cricket, 1870-1914', *The Sports Historian*, 14, 1994, pp. 66-72. It has been suggested, however, that both Davies and Norris exerted considerable influence on the Committee through personal nominees, principally John Bentley and William Hall. The assertion is highly debatable in Bentley's case due to his long connection with the Committee before joining United but the evidence is more persuasive for Hall and Norris, who had been directors together at Fulham before joining Arsenal. See Phil Soar, *Official History of Arsenal FC*, London, 1986, p. ?; Dennis Turner and Alex White, *Fulham: A Complete Record, 1879-1987*, Derby, 1987, pp. 45-46.

⁸⁹ Mason, *Association Football*, pp. 42-49; Tischler, *Footballers and Businessmen*, pp. 72-76; Vamplew, *Pay Up*, pp. 166, 168-70.

to control the boards of the Sheffield clubs, making up as much as 55 per cent of the total, while at West Ham United and the two Bradford clubs, employers and proprietors similarly represented almost half the directors.⁹⁰ Although employers and proprietors were also the largest single category on the Management Committee, they tended to be merchants, retailers or small-scale manufacturers rather than industrialists. The most striking difference, aside from the non-involvement of the working class, was the relatively high proportional representation of managers and administrators on the Management Committee. There are a number of possible explanations for this. Clearly management positions in local government or business demanded the same type of organisational skills and experience of committee work as were required for the League. Also, it is likely that such occupations allowed greater flexibility to travel long distances to committee or sub-committee meetings, often at short notice.

Interesting comparisons can also be made between the occupational composition of the Management Committee and other executive bodies. As Paul Greenhalgh has indicated, the Northern Rugby Football Union, a body with similar geographical and social roots, was also run principally by local employers and professionals, although managers and administrators were less involved than in the League. Between 1895 and 1905 only one leading member of the Union, a works manager, came from this category.⁹¹ By contrast, the FA Council, traditionally recruited from the public schools, the universities and members of the aristocracy and the upper-middle class, maintained a fairly elite presence well into the twentieth century. By 1903, the professional classes accounted for approximately 50 per cent of the Council, while managers and administrators and clerical workers followed with 26.1 per cent and 8.7 per cent respectively. Despite the increasing influence of professional, and especially Football League, clubs on the decision-making process, the Council still only included three (6.5 per cent) representatives from the employer and proprietorial bracket. The main differential in the occupational composition of the two bodies was thus the influence on the Management Committee of business interests of one kind or another,

⁹⁰ Fishwick, *English Football*, p. 27; Korr, *West Ham United*, pp. 243-44; Arnold, *A Game That Would Pay*, pp. 201-02.

⁹¹ Greenhalgh, 'Work and Play Principle', pp. 358-59. Also, Dunning and Sheard, *Barbarians, Gentlemen and Players*, pp. 188, 203.

along with the absence of the aristocracy, whose attachment to amateur ideals could be more clearly represented on the governing body.

It should be noted, however, that occupational analyses of this kind tell us very little in themselves about the type of men who joined the Committee. Bare statistics can lead to sweeping assertions and over-generalisations about motives and values. For instance, solicitors on the Committee were not a monolithic group and may have become involved for any number of reasons quite unconnected with their occupation. Moreover, occupation, like education, income and other quantifiable criteria, can only ever be a partial indicator of social class. As E. P. Thompson and others have pointed out, class should not be seen as a form of social stratification but as the embodiment of commonly held traditions, experiences and values.⁹² The political and religious affiliations of Committeemen, their beliefs and, more broadly, their lifestyles, are all therefore essential guides to both the class image and the culture of the Management Committee as a whole. It is to these broader cultural elements which we now turn.

Perhaps the most important defining characteristic of the Committee was its regional concentration in the north-west of England. Nearly one-third (29 per cent) of Committee members were directors or secretaries of Lancashire clubs, as were all four presidents in this period, although McKenna was an Irishman, not a native Lancastrian (see Appendix 1). In addition, as we have seen, after 1902 the League was based at Preston and its secretaries and other office staff were drawn exclusively from within the county. The situation became a source of considerable friction and conflict between the Committee and some clubs, and led in 1909 to an organised attempt by Midland and Southern clubs to secure a larger representation on the Committee. The editor of a Sheffield newspaper bemoaned the over-representation of Lancashire clubs and the fact that 'the Lancashire representatives on the committee came to regard their election year after year as something of a right' (see chapter 4).⁹³ Whether this regional bias was reflected in the way the League was run is a matter for conjecture. It is certainly possible to present a picture of the Committee's Lancashire leaders as an insular, tight-knit group with similar backgrounds and personalities. Bentley, Lewis,

⁹² E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, London, 1968, pp. 9-11.

⁹³ *Football and Sports Special*, 12 June 1909.

Sutcliffe and McKenna, in particular, served together for many years on the Lancashire FA, the FA Council and various other bodies in addition to the Management Committee and seem to have become friends as well as associates. Contemporary descriptions also indicate a common thread of personal characteristics - bluntness, honesty, respectability and sobriety - although it is difficult to know how far these were based on stereotypical images of middle-class Lancastrians, or northerners in general.⁹⁴

Although the evidence concerning the religious beliefs of members is patchy, it is possible to detect a dominant strand of non-conformity, again principally amongst the Lancashire leadership. Lewis was the son of a preacher and, in common with Sutcliffe, McGregor and the secretaries Charnley and Howarth, was an active and devout Methodist all his life.⁹⁵ William Cuff and his family were prominent members of the St. Domingo's Methodist Chapel from which the Everton club originated. His father had been a trustee and Cuff continued the association by becoming the chapel's choirmaster.⁹⁶ Other fragmentary evidence suggests that Amos Brook Hirst, who attended the largely non-conformist Huddersfield College, and William Bellamy, may also have been Methodists.⁹⁷ The only Catholics on the Committee in our period, McKenna and Dr. James Baxter, were not surprisingly both from Liverpool, a city which accounted for approximately one fifth of the country's Catholic population.

⁹⁴ See individual profiles in Pickford and Gibson (eds), *Association Football*, vol. 3, pp. 149-52, 159-62, 209-10 and in Sutcliffe and Hargreaves, *History of the Lancashire FA*, pp. 58-65, 157-59, 234-35. For Bentley see the 'Popular People' series in *Lancashire Review*, October 1897, pp. 42-44; *Windsor Magazine*, April 1902, pp. 665-70; Frederick Wall, *Fifty Years in Football*, London, 1935; William Pickford, *A Glance Back at the FA Council, 1888-1938*, London, 1938; Percy Young, *Bolton Wanderers*, London, 1961, pp. 43-46. For Lewis, Mike Jackman, *Blackburn Rovers: The Official Encyclopedia*, Derby, 1994, p. 145. For Sutcliffe, William Cuff's appreciation in Sutcliffe, *et al.*, *Football League*, pp. 166-67. On sporting images and stereotypes of 'northernness' see Mason, 'Football, Sport of the North?', p. 42, and Richard Holt, 'Heroes of the North: sport and the shaping of regional identity', pp. 138-39, both in Hill and Williams (ed.), *Sport and Identity*. On the historical origins of these northern characteristics see Helen M. Jewell, *The North-South Divide: The Origins of Northern Consciousness in England*, Manchester, 1994, p. 208.

⁹⁵ Jackman, *Blackburn Rovers*, p. 145; McGregor's obituary in *Birmingham Daily Mail*, 23 December 1911; *Preston Guardian*, 15 February 1936; *Lancashire Evening Post*, 12 January 1972.

⁹⁶ Thomas Keates, *History of the Everton Football Club, 1878/9-1928/9*, Liverpool, p. 114; Inglis, *League Football*, p. 171.

⁹⁷ Section in 'Who's Who' on Brook Hirst in *Huddersfield County Borough Directory 1937*, Huddersfield, 1937; *Grimsby Evening Telegraph*, 18 April 1945. The denominational intricacies of education in the West Riding are discussed in Patrick Joyce, *Work, Society and Politics: The Culture of the Factory in Later Victorian Britain*, Brighton, 1980, pp. 30-32.

Tom Houghton, often a critic of the executive before his election in 1912, appears to have been the only prominent Anglican.⁹⁸

The overwhelming tone of non-conformity on the Committee seems to have been reflected in attitudes towards both drink and gambling. McGregor and Sutcliffe were both teetotallers and active figures in the temperance movement, as was Lewis, whose sister Elizabeth Ann set up the renowned Lees Hall Teetotal Mission in Blackburn. Lewis, in fact, was a regular speaker at the Mission while Sutcliffe, too, spoke publicly on the temperance question and even gave evidence to a Royal Commission on the dangers of alcoholism.⁹⁹ Elsewhere, Walter Hart followed his father and uncle by supporting the movement and becoming a leading member, eventually a president, of the Birmingham Temperance Society.¹⁰⁰ On the other hand, the Committee included a number of members directly or indirectly associated with the drink trade. John Cameron and Phil Bach, for example, both became publicans after retiring from their respective careers. Houghton was for many years licensee at the Volunteer Inn in Preston and an agent for William Younger brewers while John Peel Oliver operated as a wine and spirit merchant and ran Newcastle's Crown Hotel.¹⁰¹ Moreover, many Committeemen were directors of clubs with close and long-standing connections with the drink trade. The most striking example was Bentley's second club, Manchester United, which was owned by the chairman of Manchester Breweries and controlled almost exclusively by directors and employees of the company.¹⁰² West Bromwich Albion, represented on the Committee by Henry Keys and William Bassett, were heavily dependent on loans from local breweries, particularly during a number of financial crises between 1905 and 1909. Other clubs, such as Tom Sidney and Arthur Oakley's Wolverhampton Wanderers and Morton Cadman's Tottenham Hotspur,

⁹⁸ Mason, *Blues and the Reds*, p. 17; Houghton's obituary in *Preston Guardian*, 21 September 1912.

⁹⁹ McGregor's obituary in the *Birmingham Daily Post*, 21 December 1911; Inglis, *League Football*, p. 108; George C. Miller, *Blackburn Worthies of Yesterday: A Biographical Galaxy*, Blackburn, 1961, p. 229.

¹⁰⁰ *Birmingham Daily Mail*, 23 March 1937 and the obituary in *Birmingham Daily Post*, 6 June 1940.

¹⁰¹ Inglis, *League Football*, pp. 392, 393; Barrett's *Directory of Preston and Fylde Districts*, 1901; Ward's *Directory of Newcastle-on-Tyne*, 1924.

¹⁰² FA Report and Recommendation of the Commission Adopted by the Council, re. Manchester United, 30 March 1910.

leased their grounds from brewery companies.¹⁰³ Even the abstaining Sutcliffe was, for a little over a year, a director of Oldham Athletic, whose Boundary Park ground was owned by the local J. W. Lees Brewery. Both Lees and Manchester Breweries were also major shareholders of the club.¹⁰⁴ In reality, then, temperance remained a personal issue. The attitudes of certain influential members could make little impact on the mutual dependence which characterised the relationship between many League clubs and the drink trade.

The Committee was more unified in its opposition to gambling, mainly due to its potentially damaging effects on the game. Primarily, of course, betting on football was opposed on moral grounds but, in addition, there was a fear that it would lead to widespread corruption, with players bribed and matches fixed. Significantly, this fear was perhaps most apparent in the League heartland of Lancashire. As well as having some of the highest conviction rates for street betting, the county boasted a large sporting and gambling press and, in Liverpool, the headquarters of the pools industry.¹⁰⁵ Hence League Committee members were instrumental in lobbying the FA, and on a wider scale, Parliament, to legislate against football betting. Lewis and Sutcliffe were both involved in the FA's 1913 inquiry into coupon betting on football which, though exonerating players, asserted that such betting remained 'a serious menace to the game'. Lewis himself warned the FA Council in 1914 that if bookmakers were allowed to increase their influence 'not a single member of that Council will remain in control of the game of football'.¹⁰⁶ The League as a body also publicly supported the Ready Money Football Betting Act, presented in Parliament by the Arsenal chairman and MP Sir Henry Norris.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ West Bromwich Albion FC Circulars to Creditors, 14 December 1905; 16 March 1907; 30 May 1908; List of West Bromwich Albion FC Creditors, 28 February 1905; December 1909; *Athletic News*, 6 March 1905; Bob Goodwin, *Spurs: A Complete Record*, Derby, 1993, p. 15.

¹⁰⁴ Minutes of Oldham Athletic FC, 17 July 1906, 3 December 1907; Stewart W. Beckett, *Team From A Town of Chimneys - Revisited: The Official Chronicles of the Oldham Athletic AFC Ltd., 1897-1990*, Manchester, 1990, p. 15; Garth Dykes, *Oldham Athletic: Complete Record, 1899-1988*, Derby, 1988, p. 10.

¹⁰⁵ Mark Clapson, 'Playing the System: The World of Organised Street Betting in Manchester, Salford and Bolton, c. 1880 to 1939' in Andrew Davies and Steven Fielding (eds), *Workers' worlds: Cultures and communities in Manchester and Salford, 1880-1939*, Manchester, 1992, p. 157; Mason, *Association Football*, pp. 179-87.

¹⁰⁶ Both quotations are from Mark Clapson, *A bit of a flutter: Popular Gambling and English Society, c. 1823-1961*, Manchester, 1992, pp. 168-69.

¹⁰⁷ *Athletic News*, 14 June 1920.

The Management Committee's collective opposition to all forms of betting was displayed most clearly in its own measures. Throughout the 1920s the executive took action in individual cases to prevent its clubs being associated with coupon betting, sweepstakes or other forms of gambling.¹⁰⁸ In the following decade opposition was directed more towards the pools. In theory, the pools represented less of a threat to the game as there were fewer incentives to rig matches. But this did not stop the Committee enacting measures to distance the League and its clubs from any contact with pools companies. In June 1934 the Committee rejected a scheme developed by a Liverpool accountant, Watson Hartley, to charge pool companies for copyright on League fixtures, by declaring that 'there can be no connection, however vague, between the League and betting'.¹⁰⁹ A year later it banned advertisements for the pools in club programmes or on grounds and, more significantly, in 1936 initiated the so-called 'Pools War' by withholding the publication of fixtures until the last moment in an attempt to destroy pools companies.¹¹⁰ Even after this had failed the Committee rejected an offer in 1938 by the Pools Promoters Association to contribute £5,000 per year to the League's Jubilee Fund.¹¹¹ Yet although these actions were determined above all by ethical and moral motives - all members of the Committee and most club representatives agreed that pool betting was a menace, or as William Cuff put it, 'a social canker'¹¹² - this did not insulate the League from attack by more radical anti-gambling elements. The Anglican Bishop Welldon, in particular, Dean of Manchester and then Durham and a prominent leader of the National Anti-Gambling League (NAGL), was a consistent critic of the governing bodies and their failure to rid professional football of all associations with gambling. The NAGL was also instrumental in prosecuting a number of newspaper publishers, including, in 1901, the Hulton Press which produced *Athletic News*, for running football coupon

¹⁰⁸ See Minutes of Football League, 5 December 1921; 23 October 1922; 5 March 1928.

¹⁰⁹ Cited in Inglis, *League Football*, p. 146. Also see *Daily Mirror*, 29 November 1935; Minutes of AFPTU, 26 August 1935 (AGM).

¹¹⁰ Clapson, *Popular Gambling*, p. 170; Fishwick, *English Football*, pp. 128-29. See chapter 4.

¹¹¹ On this occasion the Committee circularised clubs to gauge opinion on the issue. Sheffield United recommended the Committee to reject the offer outright throughout although Oldham Athletic and the newly-elected Ipswich Town voted to accept. Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 4 August 1938; Minutes of Oldham Athletic FC, 11 May, 27 July 1938; Minutes of Ipswich Town FC, 2 August 1938.

¹¹² Cuff's obituary in *The Liverpool*, February 1949.

competitions.¹¹³ *Athletic News*, of course, was closely linked with the League and at times employed Committee members: Bentley had been editor up to 1900 while Sutcliffe and Lewis contributed regular columns during the next two decades.

Many Committee members were actively involved in local public life as town councillors, magistrates, school or hospital governors and the like. Houghton, for example, was a councillor for fourteen years until his death in 1912 and vice-chairman of the Preston Conservative Association. Walter Tempest was also a Tory councillor (although he had originally been a Liberal) and later became Lord Mayor of Blackburn.¹¹⁴ In line with its religious complexion, however, the Committee seems to have been predominantly Liberal. McGregor, Leavey, Baxter and Oakley were all acknowledged Liberals, the latter pair representing the party on their respective town councils. Sutcliffe, too, was particularly active in local civic life; at different times as president of the Rossendale Liberal Party, a town councillor, an alderman and, for one year, deputy mayor.¹¹⁵ Nor were such activities restricted to the politically active. Bassett, famous above all as an England international and an FA Cup winner with his local West Bromwich Albion club, was appointed as a borough magistrate in 1935. He was also on the Board of Management of the West Bromwich and District General Hospital. According to his obituary two years later, Bassett 'was not content simply with being a football hero; he rendered great service in the social and political life of the borough'.¹¹⁶ Freemasonry, also, recognised by historians as an important element in the creation of a unitary civic culture, was a popular pastime for Committeemen.¹¹⁷

¹¹³ *Albion News*, 22 October 1921, 18 November 1922; Clapson, *Popular Gambling*, p. 163.

¹¹⁴ *Preston Guardian*, 21 September 1912; Inglis, *League Football*, p. 394.

¹¹⁵ *Birmingham Daily Post*, 21 December 1911; Inglis, *League Football*, pp. 108, 109, 391; Oakley's obituary in the *Wolverhampton Express and Star*, 4 July 1958. Other members of the Committee were from families with traditions of involvement in public life. Hart's uncle was an alderman; Keys' father was a prominent councillor in West Bromwich; whilst Brook Hirst's father-in-law was a former mayor of Huddersfield, an alderman, a county councillor and founder member of the Huddersfield and County Conservative Society. *Birmingham Daily Post*, 6 June 1940; Keys' obituary in *Midland Chronicle and Free Press*, 23 August 1929; Huddersfield County Borough Directory, 1937.

¹¹⁶ Bassett's obituary in *Midland Chronicle and Free Press*, 9 April 1937. As well as Bassett, Baxter, Tempest and Oakley were local magistrates.

¹¹⁷ J. M. Roberts, 'Freemasonry, Possibilities of a Neglected Topic', *English Historical Review*, 84, 1969, pp. 323-35; Joyce, *Work, Society and Politics*, p. 37; John Lowerson, *Sport and the Middle Classes, 1870-1914*, Manchester, 1993, pp. 21-22.

Between 1910 and 1939 the Committee included a coterie of freemasons, notably two of the presidents, McKenna and Cuff and one vice-president, Fred Rinder.¹¹⁸

It is tempting, in view of this evidence, to regard Management Committee members as leading civic figures and to see their involvement in football merely as an extension of their activities in other areas of local political and social life. Such an interpretation fits neatly with what Alice Russell has referred to as 'the overlapping character of leadership' in many industrial towns, whereby individuals 'often played several decision-making roles concurrently, so that their authority was manifestly multi-dimensional'.¹¹⁹ At the club level there is every indication that prominent figures regarded a place on the board of the local club directorate as but one aspect of their wider civic interests and duties. Whether such involvement was linked to paternalism and a selfless benevolence or a more sinister attempt to control workers in their recreations as well as their work, the implication is that it was certainly not just about football itself.¹²⁰ The collective culture of the Management Committee seems to offer a different perspective. As we have shown, Committee members could be nonconformists, teetotallers, councillors or magistrates, but above all they were football administrators, or in popular parlance, football legislators. For many Committeemen football had ceased to be merely a hobby or an interest long ago: it had become a way of life; almost a surrogate profession in itself.

With few exceptions, football took up most of the spare time of members. As well as monthly Management Committee meetings, there were sub-committees, inquiries and impromptu conferences on top of the weekly board meetings of one's own club and the work involved in organising transfers and other team matters. In addition, most members sat on the council of their respective divisional or county FA and on the committees of other local leagues and competitions. Sutcliffe, described by

¹¹⁸ Inglis, *League Football*, pp. 80, 171; Rinder's obituaries in *Birmingham Daily Post* and *Birmingham Gazette*, 27 July 1938. Houghton, Tempest and Phil Bach of Middlesborough were also freemasons.

¹¹⁹ Alice Russell, 'Local Elites and the Working-Class Response in the North-West, 1870-1895: Paternalism and Deference Reconsidered', *Northern History*, 23, 1987, pp. 158, 156. Also see Richard Whipp, *Patterns of Labour: Work and Social Change in the Pottery Industry*, London, 1990, pp. 169-74.

¹²⁰ Fishwick, *English Football*, pp. 30-32; Korr, *West Ham United*, pp. 39-40; Tischler, *Footballers and Businessmen*, pp. 71-72.

contemporary accounts as the 'brains of football', is the most striking example. Apart from his League and club responsibilities, Sutcliffe was a leading member of the Lancashire FA, becoming its president in 1926, and one of its representatives on the FA Council, where he also served on the International Selection, Rules Revision and Referees' Committees. He was also president of the Northern Counties Amateur Championship, founder of the Referees' Union, chairman, then vice-president, of his local Rossendale United club, and a representative on the Appeals Committees of approximately twenty other leagues.¹²¹ Accordingly he spent much of his time 'rushing [at] midnight or early morning to London, Birmingham or Scotland by rail' to attend meetings and other football-related activities.¹²² Nor, it seems, was Sutcliffe the exception. During the last season before his death, Rinder allegedly travelled over 1,000 miles a week on football matters and Lewis, a frequent visitor to the continent and the colonies on football trips, was said to have once covered 2,200 miles in fifteen days in England.¹²³ In this context, it is not surprising that the Committee increasingly attracted men who had retired from their careers, or were nearing retirement, and could hence devote more time and energy to football.¹²⁴

In some cases, members were able to make a living, or at least subsidise their regular earnings, as a result of their connections with the game. We have already noted that certain members were part-time, or in Bentley's case full-time, sporting journalists. McGregor, for instance, wrote regularly for the *Birmingham Daily Mail*, *Sporting Mail*, *Sports Argus* and *Birmingham Daily Post* after the turn of the century. He also gave his name to advertise some of William Shillcock's products, like the 'McGregor football' and the 'McGregor lace-to-toe football Boot'.¹²⁵ After leaving *Athletic News*, Bentley was engaged by J. H. Davies 'to manage day-to-day football affairs' at

¹²¹ Sutcliffe and Hargreaves, *Lancashire FA*, pp. 58-61; Sutcliffe's obituary in *Burnley Express*, 14 January 1939.

¹²² Sutcliffe and Hargreaves, *Lancashire FA*, p. 61.

¹²³ Rinder's obituary in *Birmingham Daily Mail*, 27 July 1938; Inglis, *League Football*, p. 64.

¹²⁴ For example, McKenna retired from his job as a vaccination officer in 1922, while Rinder was forced to resign from the Birmingham City Surveyor's Staff on reaching the age limit of 65 in the same year. Barcroft and Cadman also retired while on the Committee but both took unpaid positions - as honorary secretary and managing director respectively - of their clubs. *Birmingham Daily Mail*, 26 June 1922; *Blackpool Gazette*, 13 January 1934; Letter from Andy Porter, Spurs Club Historian, to the author, 27 November 1994.

¹²⁵ *Birmingham Daily Mail*, 23 December 1911; Inglis, *League Football*, p. 85. See also Shillcock's obituary in *Birmingham Daily Mail*, 10 October 1940.

Manchester United for £300 per year.¹²⁶ Sutcliffe's work as a solicitor also appears to have been augmented through his football contacts. As well as acting for Aston Villa in the Kingaby case, he represented the League during the West trials in 1917-18; all this in addition to his role as solicitor for the Mutual Insurance Federation. It is not clear how much money Sutcliffe earned from his football-related work, although the impression is that it could be profitable. Indeed, he was paid at least £50 for a few months assisting the floatation of Oldham Athletic in 1906.¹²⁷ However, this should not be taken to mean that all Committee members were profiteers. Only the leading figures were able to gain financially in this way and, even then, it is unlikely that this was sufficient to compensate for the time and money spent on League business.¹²⁸

Furthermore, most members had been actively involved in other levels of the game, as players or match officials. Lewis, for example, proclaimed as the 'Prince of Referees', was probably the best known official of his day. He refereed three FA Cup Finals between 1895 and 1900 and numerous internationals before retiring in 1905. Brought out of retirement to officiate at the 1908 Olympic Games in London, Lewis was still refereeing at the age of sixty-four, when he was persuaded to take control of the 1920 Olympic Final.¹²⁹ Sutcliffe was also an established international referee while Bentley, the secretary Lockett, Bellamy and Oakley were all at some point on the League list of referees or linesmen.¹³⁰ While most Committeemen played football at some stage in their youth, a number reached fairly high standards. Apart from Bassett and Bach, both of whom were ex-professionals, Bentley and Lewis were successful county players. Bentley was a regular for one of the leading Lancashire clubs Turton, and the Bolton Association, and Lewis appeared for the club he helped

¹²⁶ FA Report and Recommendation of the Commission Adopted by the Council, re. Manchester United, 30 March 1910; Tischler, *Footballers and Businessmen*, p. 74.

¹²⁷ Minutes of Aston Villa FC, 11 October 1910, 2 April 1912; Minutes of Football League, 3 June 1912 (AGM); Sutcliffe and Hargreaves, *Lancashire FA*, p. 61; Minutes of Oldham Athletic FC, 24 July 1906.

¹²⁸ In fact, prior to 1904 the Management Committee had been collectively liable for any financial losses incurred by the League. Sutcliffe and Tom Sidney refused to accept this responsibility and hence the clubs were made liable. Sutcliffe, *et al.*, *Football League*, p. 65. Without access to the appropriate financial records of the League or the individuals, we can only make suppositions on this point.

¹²⁹ Gibson and Pickford (eds), *Association Football*, vol. 3, p. 159; Jackman, *Blackburn Rovers*, p. 145; Miller, *Blackburn Worthies*, p. 229.

¹³⁰ Sutcliffe *et al.*, *Football League*, pp. 163-65; Sutcliffe and Hargreaves, *Lancashire FA*, p. 61; Gibson and Pickford, *Association Football*, vol. 3, p. 186; *Wolverhampton Express and Star*, 4 July 1958.

to form, Blackburn Rovers, and Darwen in their amateur days. Among many other examples, vice-president Harry Radford and Morton Cadman also made an impression initially as leading amateur players with their respective clubs.¹³¹ It is worth noting, at this point, the consistent presence, even as late as the 1930s, of Committee members who had been instrumental in the formation and development of clubs prior to the adoption of professionalism. Far from being hostile towards amateurism, many of those who ran the League retained some strong sympathies with elements of the amateur ethos. Bentley was unlikely to have been alone in holding 'Pure amateurism in every sport... to be the highest state'.¹³² Like many others, his experiences of football were rooted in the take-off era of the 1870s to 1890s and he remained in many ways a product of this late Victorian age.

If most members of the Management Committee were recognised principally for their involvement with football, the leading figures were unquestionably 'League men'. In fact, some were only nominally associated with their clubs and acted, in practice, as neutral League officials. Lewis severed official connections with Blackburn Rovers in the early 1900s, although he attended some games and remained vocal at annual meetings, while Sutcliffe restricted his association with Burnley to that of a spectator for much of this period. Similarly, the pressure of McKenna's duties as League president were instrumental in his leaving the Liverpool board in 1922.¹³³ Moreover, on becoming a Life Member of the League in 1912, Bentley acknowledged that although he was 'connected with many other organisations... the Football League would always be his pet'. Writing in 1906, Sutcliffe expressed similar sentiments: 'The League's interests are mine. I am a League man, a League lover, and a League servant above all'.¹³⁴ It would be erroneous to underestimate the importance of these statements. For all their occupational, social and political similarities, members of the Management Committee were bound together mainly due to their collective passion

¹³¹ *Lancashire Review*, October 1897, p. 43; Gibson and Pickford, *Association Football*, vol. 3, pp. 160. 165; A. Porter to the author.

¹³² *Windsor Magazine*, April 1902, p. 668.

¹³³ Charles Francis, *History of the Blackburn Rovers FC, 1875-1925*, Blackburn, 1925, p. 195; Gibson and Pickford, *Association Football*, vol. 3, p. 161; *Burnley Express*, 14 January 1939; Mason, *Blues and the Reds*, p. 5.

¹³⁴ Minutes of the Football League, 3 June 1912 (AGM); *Athletic News*, 10 December 1906.

for football in general, and the League in particular. It is an obvious and crucial point which, nevertheless, is too easily dismissed by historians as an afterthought.

5. CONCLUSION

In its essential features, the Football League Management Committee resembled countless middle-class organisations, sporting and otherwise, established in the late Victorian era. While entry was theoretically open to any club director, administrator or (before 1917) paid official, in practice the League was ruled by a small elite group with similar backgrounds, interests and affiliations, and, most importantly, with long associations (even before 1900) as football politicians or administrators. There was no formal blackballing clause but selection nevertheless constituted a lengthy system of nomination, canvassing and voting which ensured that only the favoured or the acceptable would be admitted.¹³⁵ As former professional footballers, it might be thought that Bassett and Bach were exceptions to the rule, but both had been established for some time as club directors with respectable professional careers. Their election was to some extent recognition of the social distance travelled since their playing days. Notwithstanding the appearance of democracy, therefore, the League executive was a closed oligarchy dominated throughout the first four decades of the twentieth century by no more than half a dozen key figures.

While ensuring stability and continuity, the administrative structure also encouraged conservatism and immobility. Radical proposals emanating from individual Committeemen or club representatives were invariably quashed or quietly pushed to one side by the leading officials. To paraphrase Alan Hardaker, if Sutcliffe, McKenna or Cuff did not like an idea, it was never implemented. Moreover, the minutes of Committee meetings and annual meetings were carefully recorded so as to marginalise signs of dissension and reinforce the 'assumed solidarity' of the League.¹³⁶ Loyalty and service to the League were highly valued and, in common with other such organisations, recognised through a formal 'honours' system of long-service medals, life membership caskets and other such titles and related insignia which helped to

¹³⁵ For parallels with the MCC see Bradley, 'The MCC', p. 30.

¹³⁶ Lowerson, *Sport and the English Middle Classes*, p. 100.

create an integrative understanding of 'tradition' within the Football League.¹³⁷ Only through a close analysis of newspaper reports and club records is it possible to detect the signs of internal dissent and independent opinion which were inevitable in a collective body of independent sporting clubs or companies.

¹³⁷ Sutcliffe *et al.*, *Football League*, pp. 51-67; Lowerson, *Sport and the English Middle Classes*, p. 23; David Cannadine, 'The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual: The British Monarchy and the Invention of Tradition, c. 1820-1977' in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds), *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge, 1983, pp. 101-64.

CHAPTER TWO

BUILDING AN EMPIRE?:

THE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE LEAGUE

The Football League is a living force, and life is growth and makes for progress.
Charles Sutcliffe, *Athletic News*, 24 May 1920.

Writers concerned with the development of the Football League have often viewed the historical process back-to-front, almost from a teleological perspective, which takes the eventual formation of a national league in 1920 as the starting-point and looks backwards to find earlier statements of such an intention. From this viewpoint, the Football League was always envisaged as a national competition, even if its founder members were geographically restricted to Lancashire and the midlands and the process of expansion was often slow and faltering.¹ Yet, only in retrospect is it possible to detect a simple and unilinear developmental process of this kind. Although the idea of expansion *seems* to have had an inevitable logic, in reality the issue was highly contentious and subject to a number of intricate, and often contradictory, considerations. Not all member clubs necessarily desired expansion, especially if there was no concomitant guarantee of increased income. In addition, there was the fear that the inclusion of more clubs would affect the status and power of the older members. Above all, there is no indication that the Football League ever adopted policies intended to eliminate its rivals and achieve monopolistic control over professional football. Many club directors and League officials believed that the game benefited from a co-existence of competing leagues and consequently opposed any amalgamation or take-over attempts. In a speech rejecting a proposed merger between the League and its Southern counterpart in 1909, Preston's chairman Tom Houghton made this point explicitly: 'As to the Southern League we wish them well, and we wish them to get on. We want antagonism. We don't want the football world to ourselves.'²

¹ For an example of this viewpoint see Churchill, *English League Football*, especially pp. 16-17.

² Report of Football League SGM in *Athletic News*, 3 May 1909.

The expansion of the League was therefore not the coherent and logical process portrayed by some writers. There was no blueprint or strategic plan to absorb the most prominent non-League clubs in order to increase the League's status and power. Rather, the League grew in a haphazard manner, increasing its size in fits and starts and only attaining a truly national constituency after nearly twenty years of discord and a series of failed schemes. The aim of this chapter is to trace the basic development of the Football League in this period and to examine the conflicting groups of interest which sought respectively to quicken and retard this process. The early part of the chapter will look at the whole debate around the idea of a 'national' Football League and the related attitude of the League towards both the Southern League and its clubs. This will be followed by a detailed examination of the role of the Management Committee and the member clubs in determining the composition of the League, focusing in particular on the election process for clubs. It will seek to determine the relative influence of, and interaction between, geographical, economic, sporting and what contemporaries often referred to as 'sentimental' factors in the election of applicants.

1. The Chaotic Growth of the League, 1888-1900

In order to understand its expansion in the twentieth century it is necessary to provide a broad chronological outline of the League's development down to 1900. Table 2.1 shows the various stages of expansion from 1888 to 1939 in terms both of the number of divisions and the total number of clubs. At first glance, there appears to have been fairly rapid growth in the first decade, with a three-fold increase from twelve to thirty-six clubs by 1898. Much of this growth was built into the League's original, which stated that there should be 'two classes of League clubs - First and Second - each to consist of twelve clubs'.³ There is also some evidence that, had it been possible to arrange the extra fixtures, the original League would have incorporated three extra clubs: Nottingham Forest, Sheffield Wednesday and the Lancashire side Halliwell.⁴ Expansion was therefore on the agenda for many directors and officials from the very start.

³ Sutcliffe *et al.*, *Football League*, p. 5.

⁴ Sutcliffe *et al.*, *Football League*, p. 3.

Table 2.1 The Growth of the Football League by Clubs, 1888-1939

	Division One	Division Two	Division Three (South)	Division Three (North)	Total Clubs
1888-91	12				12
1891-92	14				14
1892-93	16	12			28
1893-94	16	15			31
1894-98	16	16			32
1898-1905	18	18			36
1905-15	20	20			40
1919-20	22	22			44
1920-21	22	22	22*		66
1921-23	22	22	22	20	86
1923-39	22	22	22	22	88

* Simply called Division Three

Source: Based on Butler, *Football League*, p. 33.

The precise mode of expansion, however, remained undecided. At the 1891 annual meeting a scheme to extend the League to thirty-six clubs divided into three sections was rejected in favour of a modest increase from twelve clubs to fourteen.⁵ A year later the second division was finally established by the partial annexation of the Football Alliance. Three of the leading Alliance clubs, Sheffield Wednesday, Newton Heath (later to become Manchester United) and Nottingham Forest, joined the extended first division, while the remainder, together with Sheffield United, Burslem Port Vale and Northwich Victoria, formed the new second division. Only Birmingham St. George's of the Alliance clubs was denied League membership. The formation of a second division had a number of benefits. As well as absorbing and thus eliminating a rival competition, the move safeguarded the developing retain and transfer laws by subjecting the most active poachers of players to the League's authority. In addition, the League gained a number of successful and attractive playing sides. Most of the leading clubs and players outside the League were associated with the Football Alliance. Wednesday had been beaten finalists in the 1890 FA Cup Final, and in 1892 Forest reached the semi-finals, taking the eventual winners West Bromwich Albion to three replays. Bolton's secretary Harry Downs

⁵ James A. H. Catton, *The Real Football: A Sketch of the Development of the Association Game*, London, 1900, p. 85.

recalled in 1901 that the inclusion of the Alliance was considered extremely advantageous - 'a stroke of business' even - to the League by many contemporaries.⁶

From its inception, however, both the principle of the second division itself and the status attached to it were heavily questioned in some circles. Although its clubs had equal representation and voting rights, there was a distinct feeling that the second division was merely an appendage to the League proper and lacked the glamour or prestige of the first division. Blackburn's John Lewis maintained persistent opposition to the idea of the second division as an inherent part of the League structure, insisting even towards the end of 1901 that it was just 'a means to an end' and its only function was as a waiting room for the first division.⁷ The attitude of certain other clubs served to confirm the division's inferior position. Even before the official inauguration of the second division at the 1892 annual meeting, Liverpool was rejected for refusing to consider joining any competition other than the first division. After failing in their applications to the first division, Newcastle East End and an amalgamated Middlesborough club also rejected assured places in the newly formed second division, ostensibly on account of increased travelling costs but, more specifically, due to doubts over the standard and appeal of the other applicants.⁸ There was still much uncertainty the following year when the two defeated first division clubs in the initial series of test matches, Notts County and Accrington, were reportedly unable to give 'a definite reply as to joining the second division', although they both eventually decided to stay.⁹ For a number of the League's founder members the second division appeared to be a threat to their elite status and exclusivity as well as their bank balance. Fear of dropping to the second division was so acute that relegated clubs habitually proposed an enlargement of the first division at annual meetings as a means of securing their senior rank. And even as late as 1906 William

⁶ 'Harricus' (A. H. Downs), 'The Football League, 1888-1901', *Athletic News*, 4 February 1901.

⁷ *Athletic News*, 23 December 1901. As late as 1909, Lewis still distinguished the first division from the second by referring to the former as 'the real League'. *Football and Sports Special*, 16 January 1909. Also see the comments of James Catton ('Tityrus') in *Athletic News*, 1 June 1908.

⁸ Catton, *The Real Football*, p. 88; Arthur Appleton, *Hotbed of Soccer. The Story of Football in the North East*, London, 1961, pp. 83, 122. It is worth noting that inclusion in the first division would have involved far greater travelling expenses for the north-eastern clubs as there were four additional away trips but probably, of course, greater gates to compensate.

⁹ Quoted in Sutcliffe *et al.*, *Football League*, p. 77.

McGregor could bemoan the marked inferiority of the second division and the weakness, both in financial and playing terms, of a number of its clubs.¹⁰

The creation of the second division also marked the arrival of the principle of merit promotion, albeit initially in the form of the flawed test match system.¹¹ Prior to 1892 the constitution of the first division was determined by vote with the bottom four clubs each season applying for re-election. This procedure continued for the bottom clubs in the second division (with only three clubs seeking re-election from 1896) but movement between the divisions was now determined by the result of sudden-death matches played on neutral grounds between the lowest three first division and the highest three second division clubs. The first series of matches in May 1893 highlighted the potential inequities of the system. While the second and third placed clubs in the lower division both won their matches and thus progressed to the first division, champions Small Heath (later renamed Birmingham) were defeated by the higher division's bottom club Newton Heath and remained in the second. The experience of refereeing test matches over the two previous seasons had convinced Committeeman John Lewis by 1895 that the system should be abolished. At that year's annual meeting he argued that clubs who had worked their way to the top of the divisional table over the course of the season 'deserved promotion without any such ordeal'. Moreover, he was concerned that test matches were not true tests of playing strength as temporary transfers of players were often made to strengthen weak teams.¹² Though the latter of Lewis' points was dealt with through the instigation of a short-term residential qualification, the clubs chose to modify rather than abolish the system. Instead of meeting in a one-off match, the two bottom clubs in the first division and the champions and runners-up in the second competed in a play-off group in which each played the two clubs from the other division twice while the pair from the same division did not meet at all. The difficulties of this arrangement were clearly shown at the end of the 1897/98 season when an allegedly arranged goalless draw between Stoke and Burnley assured both of a first division place. According to Sutcliffe, a director himself of one of the guilty clubs, this match 'put a stop to a

¹⁰ McGregor, 'Origin and Future', p. 6.

¹¹ Much of the following section is based on Sutcliffe *et al.*, *Football League*, pp. 77-78 and 'Harricus', 'Football League', *Athletic News*, 4 February 1901.

¹² Catton, *The Real Football*, p. 93.

system which had always been clumsy and often had brought about a perversion of the football values of the season's play'.¹³ From 1898/99 test matches were discarded in favour of an automatic two-up two-down system of promotion and relegation.

It was also decided at the 1898 annual meeting to further enlarge the League though again there were differences of opinion over the exact details. The representatives of Woolwich Arsenal and Aston Villa both favoured a regionalised second division; the former proposal outlining a 16-club first division and a 32-club second divided equally between northern and southern sections and the latter requiring similarly organised divisions of 18 and 24 clubs respectively. These fairly radical suggestions were, however, easily defeated by Burnley's proposal of a simple increase of each division by two.¹⁴ Certainly this enlargement was passed partly to compensate the two sides, Newcastle United and Blackburn Rovers, who had suffered because of the arranged test match, but there was also an underlying financial motive. Sutcliffe, Burnley's representative, supported his proposal with reference to the increased revenue from additional 'League matches [which] always paid' as opposed to 'friendlies [which] never paid'.¹⁵

The geographical development of the Football League up to 1900 indicates a discernible but cautious trend towards spatial expansion. The twelve founder clubs were situated exclusively in the north-west and the midlands; six from Lancashire, three from Staffordshire and one each from Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire and Warwickshire. The first expansion was into the north-east with the inclusion in 1890 of Sunderland while from 1892 the League brought in clubs from South Yorkshire, Cheshire, Lincolnshire and Manchester. Nevertheless, this locational spread made little impact on the general pattern of membership. The original areas still dominated. Of the 32 League clubs in 1899/1900 there were nine from Lancashire and 16 from the midlands. As John Bale has noted, the League at this time 'had scarcely spread beyond a triangular belt between the Mersey and the Humber'.¹⁶ The most striking

¹³ Sutcliffe *et al.*, *Football League*, p. 77.

¹⁴ Sutcliffe *et al.*, *Football League*, p. 78.

¹⁵ Quoted in Vamplew, *Pay Up*, 1988, p. 126.

¹⁶ John Bale, *Sport and Place: A Geography of Sport in England, Scotland and Wales*, London, 1982, p. 28.

omission were clubs from London and the south; only Woolwich Arsenal (in 1893) and Luton (in 1897) joining before the turn of the century. The reasons for this were basically twofold. Firstly, southern clubs were generally slower to adopt professionalism which, though not a stated prerequisite for applicants, was closely associated with the origins and ethos of League football.¹⁷ Secondly, from the mid-1890s most of the leading professional clubs in the south were members of the Southern League. Founded in 1894 by William Henderson, secretary of Millwall Athletic, the Southern League was originally composed of sixteen clubs separated into two divisions, extended by 1900 to a 15-club first division and a nine-club second.¹⁸ Southern League clubs seriously began to rival their League compatriots on the field towards the end of the century. Southampton were particularly successful in the FA Cup, reaching the semi-final in 1898 and the final twice - in 1900 and 1902 - while Tottenham Hotspur actually won the 1901 competition. It is therefore hardly surprising that sections of the press as well as representatives of both leagues began to publicly, and one suspects privately, debate the possibility of amalgamation and the creation of a genuinely national league.

2. Towards a National League?: Problems of Expansion, 1900-20

It is possible to see the Football League's development from a small to a large and a regional to a national phenomenon as reflecting more general changes in English society. Firstly, as Jose Harris has suggested, 'the late Victorian period saw a subterranean shift in the balance of social life away from the locality to the metropolis and the nation'.¹⁹ The pivotal change here was in the economic sphere where the influence of metropolitan-based finance from about 1870 replaced that of northern manufacture. Accompanying this were discernible trends in education, technology,

¹⁷ Clubs from the capital were particularly hampered by the London FA's unyielding opposition to professionalism. According, John Bale has estimated a ten-year time-lag in the adoption of professionalism in London with most clubs remaining amateur until at least 1900. Bale, *Sport and Place*, pp. 25, 26 (figure 4.2). See also Birley, *Land of Sport and Glory*, pp. 41-42.

¹⁸ Lionel Francis, *Seventy Five Years of Southern League Football*, London, 1969, pp. 19-23. Although the League was devised essentially for professional clubs, four of the nine original members of the first division - Reading, Ilford, Clapton Orient and Royal Ordnance Factories - were amateur clubs. Harrison, *Southern League Football*, p. 5.

¹⁹ Jose Harris, *Private Lives, Public Spirit: A Social History of Britain, 1870-1914*, Oxford, 1993, p. 19.

cultural life and even language which, taken together, began to restructure society on a more uniform, centralised and national basis. For example, by the 1890s the retail, advertising and newspaper trades had all assumed a predominantly national character beyond the scope of local social and market forces.²⁰ Secondly, the early part of the century, and more specifically the inter-war period, witnessed a profound increase in industrial concentration through both amalgamation and the disproportionate growth of certain firms. Such trends were clearly evident in manufacturing, banking and retailing. In industries such as the railways, meanwhile, where regrouping in 1923 converted 120 small and medium sized companies into just four large-scale enterprises, some firms were able to occupy semi-monopolistic positions.²¹

It is true that the formation of the League itself provided a framework for greater rationalisation and centralisation of professional football and broke down to some extent the existing provincial focus of competition. Furthermore, the Football League, as the senior and most prestigious league in England and unrestricted by nominal ties to specific regions, was widely regarded as the most appropriate agency for the development of a national championship. Yet it is misleading to view the process of nationalisation as a natural or simple one: an all-embracing league of the type envisaged by some progressives raised crucial practical and theoretical issues with different implications for clubs of contrasting wealth and status. The problem was also shot through with fundamental questions regarding the ownership and identification of the League. Should the League be essentially a self-absorbed organisation concerned only with the interests of its members or did it have a broader responsibility for the development of the game in general? Opinion varied, even within the Management Committee, where these contesting perspectives were typified by the respective attitudes of John Lewis and Charles Sutcliffe.

²⁰ Harris, *Private Lives, Public Spirit*, pp. 17-23; Asa Briggs, *Victorian Cities*, London, 1968, p. 48.

²¹ Leslie Hannah, *The Rise of the Corporate Economy*, 2nd. Edition, London, 1983, chapter 1; Stephen V. Ward, *The Geography of Interwar Britain: The State and Uneven Development*, London, 1988, p. 14; B. W. E. Alford, 'New Industries for Old? British Industry between the wars' in Roderick Floud and Donald McCloskey (eds.), *The Economic History of Britain Since 1700, vol. 2: 1860 to the 1970s*, Cambridge, 1981, pp. 323-28.

From the beginning there were two basic means by which the League could extend its boundaries: by increasing the actual number of places available or, alternatively, through the piecemeal replacement of unsuccessful or 'weak' clubs. Although during the early 1900s neither option proved significantly popular to alter the inherent conservatism of the majority of members, there were some signs of a more liberal attitude towards the idea of expansion and the inclusion of non-League, especially southern, clubs. An important breakthrough in this respect was the appointment in 1901 of the first representative of a southern club to the Management Committee. Woolwich Arsenal's George Leavey was a particularly significant choice due to his active commitment to amalgamation with the Southern League. He had previously organised a informal meeting in May 1900 between representatives of the two leagues and the following February circularised League clubs regarding a proposed enlargement of the first division to 20 clubs and a second, southern-based, section for the lower division.²² Although both attempts ultimately failed, *Athletic News* still considered his appointment in May 1901 to be 'a very significant step, for Mr Leavey will work might and main for the end he has in view - the union of the parent body with its Southern contemporary'. Moreover, the concept of amalgamation had by now received endorsement from the League president, John Bentley. At that year's annual meeting Bentley reportedly 'hinted that in another twelve months an international body (sic.), meaning... a League embracing the pick of the clubs North and South, would be an accomplished fact'.²³

However, it is unclear at this stage whether the Football League had taken any positive steps in this direction. Even at Management Committee level there seems to have been some confusion over the subject. In his *Athletic News* column in late 1901, Lewis completely dismissed suggestions that the League was considering the incorporation of the best Southern League clubs and that leading members of the Management Committee had recently approached their southern counterparts over the question.²⁴ Bentley replied a week later that the Southern League had indeed been approached in an unofficial manner and that 'nothing would delight [him] more than

²² *Athletic and Sporting Chat*, 9 May 1900; Minutes of Aston Villa FC, 28 February 1901.

²³ Report of Football League AGM in *Athletic News*, 20 May 1901.

²⁴ *Athletic News*, 25 November 1901.

to see the Southern League amalgamated with the Football League'. Apparently refusing to accept Bentley's statement, Lewis re-emphasised that in his two years on the Committee the question of amalgamation had never been considered either formally or informally: indeed, 'If anything had been done in this direction, I should have thought I was entitled to hear about it'.²⁵

If any schemes to establish a national league were formulated at these informal meetings they were never made public. Neither, it seems, was there any organised attempt to bring in Southern League clubs on an individual basis, although the admission of Bristol City, a highly successful Southern League club, in 1901 had appeared to suggest otherwise. Robert Campbell, the club secretary, supported his application on the grounds that 'the election of Bristol would be an inducement for other Southern League clubs to join, for,... it was absolutely impossible for a few strong clubs to exist where there were so many unattractive matches'.²⁶ Yet, possibly buoyed by the cup success of Southampton and Tottenham, no club from the Southern League, or indeed the south, applied for Football League membership again until 1905. Indeed, the *Athletic News* correspondent at the 1903 annual meeting deprecated the fact that none of that year's applicants hailed from either the south or the Midlands.²⁷ It is also of some significance that neither of the London clubs who joined as part of the League's expansion in 1905 had any prior long-standing connection with the Southern League. Clapton Orient had spent just a few seasons during the 1890s as well as the 1904/05 season in the second division of the Southern League while Chelsea, an entirely new club formed just two months before its admission to the League, had actually faced severe opposition to its original intention of entering the Southern League, particularly from close neighbours Fulham.²⁸

At this time the question of whether the League should be expanded remained quite separate from the more general idea of a national league. As we have seen, in many cases expansion was advocated as a form of self-preservation for lowly clubs. This

²⁵ *Athletic News*, 2 December 1901.

²⁶ Report of Football League AGM in *Athletic News*, 20 May 1901.

²⁷ Report of Football League AGM in *Athletic News*, 18 May 1903.

²⁸ *Manchester Evening News*, 8 May 1907. Also see Ralph Finn, *A History of Chelsea Football Club*, London, 1969, p. 12.

was the case both in 1901 and 1902 when Preston North End led unsuccessful campaigns for a 40-club League: a development which on either occasion may have given the club a place in the first division. More importantly, supporters of expansion began to argue that it offered two fundamental advantages: greater financial security for clubs and increased status and authority to the League as a whole. On the first point, it was asserted that a few extra League matches per season, played mid-week if necessary, would increase the annual income of the majority of clubs who were unable to make extra money from successful FA Cup runs. As many clubs already filled blank fixture dates with friendlies or minor cup competitions, why not play more League matches, which always guaranteed a more satisfactory gate? Secondly, many shared the view of Lincoln City's John Strawson, who believed that in future disputes with the FA or any other organisation, a larger and wider-reaching League would be more influential: 'the more strength and importance that could be bestowed upon the Football League the less danger there would be to it when trouble arose'.²⁹ At both the 1901 and 1902 annual meetings the majority of delegates voted in favour of an increased number of clubs but the proposal fell short of the necessary three-quarters majority, though only by four votes on the first occasion.

In general it was the wealthier clubs who blocked moves to expand. The attitude of Aston Villa was probably typical in this respect. Villa's directors consistently opposed the enlargement of the first division, though they had no objection to a larger second group 'providing some provision be made whereby their voting power should not predominate over that of the first division'.³⁰ The main fear, according to the club's representative Fred Rinder, was of 'too much football... there was only a certain amount of money to be spent on football, which was essentially a Saturday afternoon game'.³¹ Yet opponents revealed that Villa itself often fitted in more than one match a week: in fact, the club had played 16 matches in just three weeks during April 1902. It seems once again that the real motives were financial. More League matches would mean increased compensation to other clubs for loss of League gates when fixture dates had to be switched, a situation which successful cup sides like Villa and

²⁹ Reports of Football League AGMs in *Athletic News*, 20 May 1901, 2 June 1902.

³⁰ Minutes of Aston Villa FC, 28 February 1901.

³¹ Report of Football League AGM in *Athletic News*, 20 May 1901.

Sheffield United particularly resented.³² By 1905, however, opinion had shifted to the point where Sutcliffe's proposal of 20 clubs in each division received support from leading clubs like Liverpool and Newcastle United. It was passed by 31 votes to six without any counter-argument, although Sheffield United amongst others remained unmoved in its opposition.³³

From about 1906 support for the idea of an enlarged national league, in principle at least, seems to have become more intense. The impetus for this came as much from the growth of professional clubs in rugby-playing areas, especially Yorkshire, as from the south. Bradford City had joined the Football League in 1903 and were followed two years later by Leeds City and Hull. In addition, a number of Northern Union clubs actually abandoned the rugby code in favour of the reputedly more profitable association game.³⁴ Some commentators suggested that the League should accommodate these new clubs by extending its boundaries. The writer of a letter to *Athletic News* in April 1906, for instance, advocated a new third division 'as a means of promoting football in rugby playing towns'. Later the same month William Pickford, an FA Councillor, suggested that room should be made in the League for the 'young giant professional clubs' developing in rugby areas. He proposed the creation of a gigantic Football League with multiple regional divisions; the national champions emerging from a series of matches at the season's end between each divisional winner.³⁵ Nevertheless, for most club directors and Committeemen the principle of a national league meant expansion southwards. William McGregor, founder and now a life member of the League, was the most influential proponent of the idea. The 'nationalisation' of the League was in his view an inevitable evolutionary process. He foresaw 'the gradual bringing in of influential clubs at present outside the organisation with the object sooner or later of making the League a truly national body. While it

³² Clubs were required to compensate their opponents for switching fixture dates, often from Saturdays to Mondays, due to FA Cup ties, which took precedence. Until 1912 there were no fixed regulations for compensation and so claims were made but generally opposed, leaving the Management Committee to reach a decision. See, for example, Minutes of Aston Villa FC, 29 March, 19 April 1900.

³³ *Athletic News*, 5 June 1905; Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 11 May 1905.

³⁴ Terry Frost, *Bradford City: A Complete Record, 1903-1988*, Derby, 1988, pp. 11-13; A. J. Arnold, *A Game That Would Pay*, p. 41; 'The Belated Entry of Professional Soccer into the West Riding of Northern England', *IJHS*, 6, 3, pp. 326-30; David Russell, "'Sporadic and Curious": The Emergence of Rugby and Soccer Zones in Yorkshire and Lancashire, c. 1860-1914', *IJHS*, 5, 2, pp. 196-201.

³⁵ *Athletic News*, 9, 23 April 1906. A version of this scheme was originally advocated by R. P. Gregson, secretary of the Lancashire FA.

does not include Southampton, Portsmouth and Tottenham Hotspur, it cannot be said to be truly representative'.³⁶ Sutcliffe similarly considered the Football League's ultimate and ideal constitution to be 'a great National League, comprising within its borders the best, and all the best, clubs in the country'.³⁷

Towards the end of 1906 and in early 1907 Sutcliffe outlined in the press a number of possible schemes for the creation of a national league. Notwithstanding the fact that his proposals were made independently of the Management Committee, Sutcliffe's intervention undoubtedly represented a turning point in the whole debate. Prior to this the idea of a national league had existed primarily in the abstract: now it was given concrete form by a prominent and respected League Committee member. Sutcliffe's proposals brought the issue into the open and placed it firmly on the agenda for League directors, officials and the sporting press. Moreover, for the first time these schemes provoked a positive response from a number of Southern League clubs. Previously the more successful Southern League clubs had not considered it beneficial to apply for admission to the Football League. With only three places open each year, and League clubs generally favoured in the election process, the chances of admission were extremely slight. Also, the second division of the League was widely considered as only comparable to, or even weaker than, the first division of the Southern League. Admission thus offered no guarantees of financial or sporting progress: quite the opposite, it could mean years of struggle in a modest competition with the burden of greater transfer fees and travelling expenses.³⁸ But inclusion of the Southern League *en bloc* was a different proposition entirely. In March 1907, the Fulham chairman Henry Norris wrote a letter to *Athletic News* in support of Sutcliffe's idea for merging the two leagues into what he called 'a Universal League'.³⁹ He was obviously not alone because a week later the Southern League officially called a joint meeting 'to enter into arrangements for the formation of a new National League on the basis of fusion between the Football League and the Southern League' which, according to the latter, would 'end all troubles as to transfers, maximum wages and bonuses'.⁴⁰ The

³⁶ McGregor, 'Origin and Future', p. 6.

³⁷ *Athletic News*, 10 December 1906.

³⁸ *Athletic News*, 10 December 1906.

³⁹ *Athletic News*, 4 March 1907.

⁴⁰ Quoted in Inglis, *League Football*, p. 60.

League Management Committee in response gave no opinion for or against but instead circularised the clubs to see whether they were willing to negotiate with the southerners. Although 26 of the 38 replies favoured meeting the Southern League, the Management Committee rejected the idea on the grounds that the necessary three-quarters majority had not been reached.⁴¹

Even though the Southern League publicly asserted an equality with the Football League, its subordinate position was increasingly accepted by its leadership and many of its clubs. Appendix 2 clearly shows that the successes of Southern League clubs in relation to Football League clubs around the turn of the century in the national FA Cup competition, and through their provision of players for the England international team, had markedly diminished by the mid and late 1900s. What is more, there were clear signs at this point of stagnation and of some internal club dissension from the Southern League's central policies. Details are relatively scarce but it seems that from about 1906 some of the leading clubs - Fulham, Tottenham Hotspur, West Ham United and Portsmouth in particular - were urging the Southern League to reform drastically and adopt 'a more enlightened policy'. The rejection of 'new' professional clubs like Crystal Palace and Chelsea was seen by contemporaries such as the Tottenham director G. Wagstaffe Simmons as a sign of the restrictive conservatism of the southern body. The Football League, in contrast, was increasingly regarded as a model of how to organise a successful and popular competition. For London clubs especially, the inclusion of Chelsea and Clapton Orient in 1905 made the League a more attractive option. It now appeared to be less of a closed shop than the Southern League and, in Simmons' words, to have 'a more catholic outlook'.⁴² In this context, Fulham's successful application to the Football League in June 1907 had a crucial impact on future relations between the two leagues. Unlike the League's other southern recruits, Fulham had been an established member of the Southern League for some years. It joined in the 1898/99 season and had been champions in the two seasons prior to leaving. Hence its secession provoked a defensive response from the Southern League executive and its clubs. A motion banning any club applying to the

⁴¹ *Athletic News*, 18 March, 8 April 1907.

⁴² G. Wagstaffe Simmons, *History of the Tottenham Hotspur FC: Its Birth and Progress, 1882-1946*, London, 1947, p. 72.

Football League from future membership with the Southern League was considered but rejected.⁴³ The following year the Southern League went further, expelling two of its leading clubs, Queen's Park Rangers and Tottenham Hotspur, when they applied individually to join the Football League. In addition, clubs were prohibited from applying for a League place in the future under a severe penalty. Although neither club was initially elected, the Southern League remained adamant that drastic action was necessary to secure the status and self-respect of their competition. As one representative put it, 'the Southern League [will] not allow itself to be made a stepping-stone to any other competition'.⁴⁴

Despite apparent increasing animosity between the two bodies, the idea of amalgamation was regularly discussed in official circles and in the press over the next few years. In June 1908 the League Management Committee, under instruction from its member clubs, invited applications for a proposed third division but this was shelved 'owing to the small number of applicants and the calibre of clubs'.⁴⁵ The debate intensified again in March 1909 when the Southern League Management Committee approached its League counterpart with a proposal to fuse the leagues into a sixty-club competition, consisting of a first division of twenty clubs and two second divisions, north and south; the latter with equal status, voting rights and chances of promotion. Hence the first division of the Southern League would be on a par with the second division of the Football League. Representatives and supporters of the League dismissed the scheme emphatically. *Athletic News* argued that the Southern League clubs wanted 'power and the prospects of promotion... and they offer NOTHING in return'.⁴⁶ Even Sutcliffe, who supported the principle of amalgamation, warned League clubs that they would 'be making a tremendous concession to a weaker organisation if they enter into the suggested agreement'.⁴⁷ The proposal was therefore, not surprisingly, rejected unanimously by the clubs but the idea of

⁴³ Report of Southern League AGM in *Athletic News*, 3 June 1907.

⁴⁴ Report of Southern League AGM in *Athletic News*, 1 June 1908. Both clubs were invited to re-join the Southern League under certain conditions. Queen's Park Rangers accepted but were forced to play all their matches in mid-week but Tottenham refused and were eventually elected to fill a vacant place in the Football League at the end of June. Francis, *Seventy Five Years*, p. 43.

⁴⁵ Minutes of Football League, 29 June 1908.

⁴⁶ *Athletic News*, 15 March 1909.

⁴⁷ *Athletic News*, 22 February 1909.

amalgamation through the creation of a third division remained on the table.⁴⁸ Indeed, further meetings in April between the two leagues led to a comprehensive joint proposal for the inclusion of eighteen Southern League clubs as the basis of a new third division, with limited rights of voting and representation (see Appendix 3). In a circular letter to its clubs, the League Management Committee gave its official approval to the scheme, indicating that 'the time was now opportune for the formation of a third division'.⁴⁹

In many ways the debates surrounding this proposed third division were related to broader problems concerning the role, obligations and identification of the Football League in the early twentieth century. Most of this was tied up with either the rejection or acceptance of the national league idea and officials, directors and journalists were often divided on their attitude to this question. Opponents of expansion drew on arguments which remained essentially unchanged throughout the period. Firstly, the League was perceived to be a self-concerned organisation whose interests were bound up solely with those of the clubs which comprised its membership. Anything beyond this, including the development of a national league, was therefore considered marginal or even irrelevant. Lewis, one of the most vociferous opponents of change, employed this argument frequently in his newspaper columns. In April 1905 he informed *Athletic News* readers that:

The League has never set itself up as a "national competition", and although it embraces clubs as far apart as Newcastle and London, Sunderland and Bristol, it has never encouraged the idea which has sprung up of late, especially in the South, that it should represent the whole country... In the beginning it regarded itself as an association of twelve good clubs banded together for mutual advantage, and although it now numbers 36 clubs it neither claims to be a "representative national body" nor to do anything except regulate its own competition.⁵⁰

During the 1909 debate he re-emphasised his view that 'the Football League does not aspire to be a National League'⁵¹ but expressed a fear that it was in danger of opening

⁴⁸ *Athletic News*, 5 April 1909; Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 17 March 1909.

⁴⁹ Football League Circular to Clubs, 30 April 1909.

⁵⁰ *Athletic News*, 24 April 1905.

⁵¹ *Football and Sports Special*, 16 January 1909.

its doors too widely to ambitious clubs across the country and hence being 'forced into the position of a national body'.⁵²

Secondly, this argument also became linked to elements of north-south or London against the provinces rivalry which, as Mason has indicated, were evident in organised football from at least the early 1880s.⁵³ There was a widely held conception of the Football League as a small, selective and geographically restricted competition in which the provinces, and Lancashire especially, should be autonomous from metropolitan control. The entry of four London clubs after 1905, and subsequent proposals of amalgamation with the south, thus appeared to threaten not only the existing power structure but also the identity of the League. As Lewis noted in May 1909, 'For some time I have held and expressed the opinion that the Football League was in danger of assuming too much of a London complexion'. He went on: 'if a Third Division is brought into existence under the suggested scheme it can only be a matter of a very few seasons before... a competition which was provincial in its inception, and provincial in spirit, will have all its safeguards broken down'.⁵⁴ Moreover, animosity towards the Southern League specifically had been fuelled by events of the previous few years. League officials and club directors had clearly been incensed by the Southern League's expulsions of 1908 and the subsequent veto placed on clubs. This built on the existing bitterness between the leagues over transfer problems and the poaching of players as well as the southern body's alleged attempts to lure away Woolwich Arsenal, the Football League's senior southern member. Accordingly Tom Houghton, chairman of Preston North End, argued that the Southern League 'had always been their [the League's] greatest enemies... in a football sense' rather than compatriots and should thus be left to organise their own competition. Other club directors at the decisive general meeting of 30 April agreed that, while they favoured the formation of a third division in principle, certain clubs in the north and midlands had stronger claims than the 18 southern clubs whom 'they knew nothing about'.⁵⁵

⁵² *Birmingham Sporting Mail*, 17 April 1909.

⁵³ Mason, *Association Football*, p. 75. Also see Mason, 'Football, Sport of the North?', pp. 41-52.

⁵⁴ *Football and Sports Special*, 1 May 1909.

⁵⁵ Both quotations from Report of Football League SGM in *Athletic News*, 3 May 1909.

In addition to these major objections to the principle of a national league there were a number of practical difficulties. Most significant was the problem of increased travelling expenses for those clubs unfortunate enough to be relegated to a predominantly southern third division. Most commentators recognised that for struggling northern clubs relegation could lead to financial ruin and cited Bradford Park Avenue's heavy loss of £1,360 in just one season of Southern League football during 1907/08.⁵⁶ It is worth noting that most Southern League clubs outside London were also worried about possible future increases in travel costs. A representative of Plymouth Argyle intimated this in an interview during early 1909 while two years later the Swindon secretary asserted more directly 'that his club is not in favour of travelling about to meet Walsall, Kettering, Chesterfield, or the like when their journeys in their own league are economical and convenient'.⁵⁷ Equally problematic was the fact that an enlarged League contravened FA rules and might cause objections from the governing body. The FA's regulations for the sanction and control of leagues restricted the size of any league to 40 clubs and required consent for any alterations in composition. At a time of serious friction between the two bodies some believed that FA approval was far from certain. Stoke's secretary H. D. Austerberry thought the governing body would need 'to be satisfied that such an extension was necessary, or desirable, and that no serious injury would be inflicted on other competitions'.⁵⁸ Having said this, it must be noted that those more directly connected with the procedure and attitude of the FA argued that it would not be inflexible or stand in the way of a merger of this type, a point confirmed by the smooth passage of the third division through the Leagues Sanction Committee when it was finally formed in 1920.

Those within the Football League who supported amalgamation with the south tended to regard it as both a means of strengthening the competition and a way of solving existing financial difficulties. Clearly leading figures like Sutcliffe and Bentley were at least partly motivated by the increased prestige and power which aggrandisement

⁵⁶ *Athletic News*, 18 January 1909; Arnold, *A Game That Would Pay*, p.58. By comparison, Bradford PA suffered a loss of just £500 after election to the Football League the following season and made a profit in each subsequent season until the first world war.

⁵⁷ *Athletic News*, 25 January 1909, 30 October 1911.

⁵⁸ *Athletic News*, 11 January 1909.

brought. The concept of a national league embracing the best clubs in the south as well as the north had a powerful hold on Committeemen of this kind who, in contrast with the earlier period, were more concerned with the progress of the League as a whole than the well-being of individual clubs. More importantly, there was a feeling that amalgamation represented a type of panacea for the wage and transfer problems afflicting League clubs at the time and that it would enable club directorates to exercise tighter control over their employees. Up to this point neither league recognised the other's registration rights, which resulted in an unfettered traffic of players between the two. This, it was said, would be solved if the whole of the elite professional game came under a single authority. In the same way it was rather simplistically asserted that amalgamation would end the maximum wage and bonus disputes. This was certainly the view of Sutcliffe in February 1907 when he supported his proposed scheme by arguing that:

the wage rule was passed to prevent poaching. The League rules safeguarded its clubs from each other, but not from outsiders. The League had to fear the Southern League clubs and vice versa. But if the Southern League joined the Football League then the weakened poorer clubs are safeguarded by League rule, better than by any maximum wage rule, or limitation... of bonus.⁵⁹

Bentley similarly thought that the proposed third division in 1909 would 'go a long way towards stopping the trouble and discontent they had had during... the past season. It would make clubs more secure and players more settled'.⁶⁰

There seems little doubt that a concerted effort was made by influential League officials, including Bentley and Sutcliffe, to bring the projected national league to fruition in 1909. An opponent of the idea even angrily suggested that 'some members of the Management Committee... are determined that the Southern League shall come in under one pretence or another'.⁶¹ Yet the practical difficulties of achieving a three-quarters majority to alter the League constitution, together with the general inertia of clubs towards any legislative change, made the task insurmountable. Given that the

⁵⁹ *Athletic News*, 25 February 1907.

⁶⁰ Report of Football League SGM in *Athletic News*, 3 May 1909.

⁶¹ Comment by Tom Houghton from Report of Football League SGM in *Athletic News*, 3 May 1909.

majority of clubs, such as Sheffield United whose representative was left to vote at his own discretion, were fairly non-committal on the issue⁶², the attacks launched by Lewis in the press and by Houghton, Middlesbrough's Colonel Poole and Clapton Orient's Captain Wells-Holland at the special meeting proved sufficient to defeat the motion by three votes. But the whole episode had certainly helped to cement official relations between the leagues because in February 1910 it was finally agreed to recognise each other's player registration and transfer rights and establish the joint English League Board as an arbitration body (see chapter 1).

There was a fresh wave of agitation for a national league in 1911, though on this occasion the Southern League as a body was left on the margins. In May a small group of northern clubs led by Lincoln City asked the Management Committee once more to look into the idea of a third division. The Committee responded by calling for applicants in the press: twenty clubs replied, five of whom were members of the second division of the Southern League. Although the Management Committee had made no commitment to forming a third division, and indeed subsequently withdrew the idea, the episode still caused acute embarrassment to the Southern League. In view of the newly developed understanding and closer relations between the bodies the Southern League informed its northern counterpart that the latter's independent action in considering the formation of a third division was 'an unfriendly act'. As A. J. Darnell, one of the leading southern officials, commented: 'When we entered into agreement with the Football League... there was no talk or suggestion of a Third Division, and I really think that the least the Football League can do is to consult us on the matter'.⁶³ External calls for a third division continued into the winter as two largely separate movements, based respectively around prominent Southern League and northern non-League clubs, emerged to campaign for this end. After considerable agitation, a referendum of League clubs again resulted in the overwhelming rejection of the idea of a third division, with just twelve out of forty in favour.⁶⁴ The reasons clubs gave for this decision confirm the feeling of *Athletic News* that a division of this type would 'materially lower the calibre and dignity of the League'.⁶⁵ For example,

⁶² Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 28 April 1909.

⁶³ Report of Southern League AGM in *Athletic News*, 19 June 1911.

⁶⁴ *Athletic News*, 11 and 18 December 1911.

⁶⁵ *Athletic News*, 6 November 1911.

the Sheffield United Committee thought a third division was impracticable while Aston Villa, more directly, replied that 'the clubs were not considered good enough'.⁶⁶ Moreover, by this stage it seems that Preston had grown tired of the incessant appeals for action from outside parties. At the next annual meeting the president, John McKenna, wearily dismissed as inconsequential the contents of a postcard given to him mooted the formation of a third division.⁶⁷

Certainly, there were no serious suggestions of expansion or amalgamation up to or during the war. Moreover, by the end of 1918 the Southern League was both competitively and administratively weaker than at any other time in its existence. In December 1918 the Southern League agreed as a body to apply to enter the Football League, either as a third division or a regionalised second division.⁶⁸ Yet by this time the advantages of amalgamation for the League seemed minimal. Indeed, *Athletic News* called the Southern League's proposal 'a miserable document' and thought its clubs should 'set their house in order and save themselves, a much finer ambition than to hang on to the coat-tails of their brethren in the Midlands and the North'.⁶⁹ Hence, on the direction of the Management Committee, the clubs decided once again not to entertain the Southern League's proposals.

However, the admission of individual Southern League clubs continued. Stoke had rejoined the Football League in 1915, Coventry City were co-opted in 1918 and along with West Ham United were elected to full membership in March 1919, while an additional seven Southern League clubs also initially applied.⁷⁰ These losses evidently proved too much for the Southern League executive, who subsequently claimed all rights to the players of its three former clubs.⁷¹ Furthermore, Harry Bradshaw, the Southern League secretary, argued that his league had been 'treated in a most unfriendly manner by the Football League' when West Ham was elected to the League without first resigning from its present competition. In the light of this, and

⁶⁶ Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 13 December 1911; Minutes of Aston Villa FC, 12 December 1911.

⁶⁷ Minutes of Football League, 3 June 1912 (AGM).

⁶⁸ Minutes of West Ham United FC, 9 December 1918.

⁶⁹ *Athletic News*, 20 January 1919.

⁷⁰ Harrison, *Southern League Football*, p. 57.

⁷¹ Minutes of West Ham United FC, 17 March, 9 April 1919; *Athletic News*, 23 June 1919.

other alleged examples of discourtesy and disregard on the part of the League, Bradshaw informed the League of the Southern League's immediate withdrawal from the 1910 transfer agreement.⁷² The League in response stood firm, backing its new recruits and telling them to ignore the Southern League's claims. This conclusive breach in relations between the two bodies had important repercussions. As well as terminating formal connections it clearly weakened the Southern League's claims to be treated as an equal partner in the League combine. *Athletic News* felt that the Southern League had now reduced itself 'to quite a parochial organisation' while the League was increasingly coming to be perceived, and to perceive itself, as a national league.⁷³

Yet the eventual absorption of the first division of the Southern League to create a national league during 1920 was certainly not the inevitable or logical culmination of these events. On the contrary, it was more a product of improvisation on the part of a small group of League officials and club directors. In March of that year, Sutcliffe, previously the most influential proponent of the idea, had publicly stated that he now believed a third division would not strengthen the Football League but hold it back.⁷⁴ Whether this was a ploy intended to generate discussion on the idea must remain a matter for conjecture. It is instructive, however, that less than a month later he wrote an article in *Athletic News* advocating a possible scheme for the formation of a third division separated into northern and southern sections, the latter to be made up entirely of the Southern League first division. But, in contrast to previous schemes, the new clubs would only be admitted as associate rather than full members, with no voting or transfer rights, and under the guidance and control of the Management Committee (see Appendix 4). Although Sutcliffe presented this as 'a scheme for discussion, not adoption',⁷⁵ there was an immediate response and agitation began apace in both the north and south. Within two weeks a group of northern clubs had committed themselves to the adoption of Sutcliffe's scheme and a few days later the Southern League clubs agreed almost unanimously to re-apply to the League for their

⁷² *Athletic News*, 28 July 1919.

⁷³ *Athletic News*, 28 July 1919.

⁷⁴ *Athletic News*, 29 March 1920.

⁷⁵ *Athletic News*, 3 May 1920.

election *en bloc*.⁷⁶ By the time of the annual meeting in early June the League had received deputations from both groups and Sutcliffe's scheme had been approved by the Management Committee, although it was decided to postpone the formation of the northern section for at least a year. Not surprisingly, the proposal generated some opposition, principally from Everton, whose representative thought the clubs needed more time to consider such a 'huge revolution' in the League's composition. Yet Sutcliffe's appeal that 'the League should comprise all the great clubs in the country' was powerful enough to gain the requisite support. The three-quarters majority was attained with only eight dissidents.⁷⁷

Within just a month of Sutcliffe's speculative article, then, the national league had become a reality: as 'Tityrus' observed, it 'arose like Aladdin's palace'.⁷⁸ Why it should have happened at this time, and so rapidly, is not easy to explain. Arnold and Benveniste's contention that it was 'a defensive mechanism to prevent the Southern League growing in importance' is clearly mistaken.⁷⁹ As we have seen, the Southern League had been gradually weakened over the previous twenty years by the regular loss of its leading clubs to the Football League and, by 1920, was increasingly seen as a cul-de-sac offering no long-term future for ambitious clubs. A more plausible argument is that expansion was linked to the immediate post-war financial well-being of the game in general. In common with other sectors of the leisure industry, and the economy in general, professional football experienced a significant post-war boom, with the 1919/20 season witnessing the highest attendances on record. Moreover, the League itself was more prosperous than it had ever been, enjoying a surplus of £3,600, which had been greatly aided by a new half per cent levy on all gates (see chapter 4).⁸⁰ It may have been that in these circumstances the members felt confident enough to risk taking on an extra twenty, and subsequently forty-four, clubs without the financial or footballing guarantees which were usually required.

⁷⁶ Francis, *Seventy Five Years*, p. 43.

⁷⁷ Minutes of Football League, 29 May, 31 May 1920 (AGM); Report of Football League AGM in *Athletic News*, 7 June 1920.

⁷⁸ *Athletic News*, 7 June 1920.

⁷⁹ A. J. Arnold and I. Benveniste, 'Wealth and Poverty in the English Football League', *Accounting and Business Research*, 17, 1987, p. 196.

⁸⁰ Jones, *Workers at Play*, p. 36; Inglis, *League Football*, p. 120.

While opposition to the idea of a national league amongst League and club officials seemed largely to have dissipated by 1920, there were still some vocal critics. The attitude of players themselves is of some significance here. For those engaged by the newly-elected third division clubs it may have been that their status and potential financial opportunities were raised; though a more plausible assumption is that the change had little real effect as their immediate relationship to their employers had not altered. For players engaged by first or second Division clubs, however, the impact was more dramatic. Charlie Buchan retrospectively called the creation of the two third division sections 'the biggest mistake in [the Football League's] history'. First, he believed that it had led to a lowering of playing standards as 'there were not enough first-class players to go round'. More importantly, however, Buchan suggested that the amalgamation of the two premier league organisations had further restricted the players' freedom of movement by precluding those who were dissatisfied at League clubs from moving to a Southern League club without transfer. The Southern League had been 'an outlet, and a blessing, to the lesser-known second team man' but by the summer of 1921 the Football League had finally closed and sealed this avenue of opportunity.⁸¹

3. The Election of Clubs

The development of the Football League was not simply a matter of expansion. As economists of sport have shown, changes in the composition of the agreed number of clubs can also act as a means of controlling the quality of a league and ensuring its financial viability. Unlike in the United States, the League had no equivalent to the franchise system which allowed the league executive to move club franchises from smaller towns or less densely-populated areas to ones with a greater crowd potential.⁸² Instead, changes could be made annually via the election system. The clubs with the poorest playing records during the season were compelled to apply for re-election, together with any clubs outside the League who wanted to join. Member clubs were then able to make individual judgements and vote by secret ballot on the applicants

⁸¹ Charlie Buchan, *A Lifetime in Football*, London, 1956, pp. 64, 66.

⁸² P. J. Sloane, 'Restriction of Competition in Professional Team Sports', *Bulletin of Economic Research*, 18, 1976, p. 5; Vamplew, *Pay Up*, p. 112.

most suitable for admission. This section will look at the whole election process but will concentrate particularly on the motives of those voting, which were certainly more varied and complex than some previous work has suggested. Tischler, for example, has emphasised the exclusive importance of population size and the club's ability to draw crowds as factors in the election of clubs.⁸³ This analysis is more in keeping with the view taken by Arnold, which suggests a broad range of influences. He argues that voting was made 'by reference to geographical and traditional factors as well as the economic or playing attributes of the various applicants'.⁸⁴

The election of clubs had by 1900 become an established part of the proceedings at each annual meeting. Aside from resignations, which were rare, the system offered emerging clubs outside the League their only chance of admission. Hence, as Table 2.2 shows, the number of applications stayed relatively high throughout the period and existing members were rarely elected unopposed. Initially the bottom four clubs had to apply for re-election each season but this was reduced to three in 1898 and then two by 1908. From 1921 two clubs from each section of the third division were required to retire from, and then re-apply to, their individual sections and this system continued to the end of the period. Applications for membership had to be sent in writing to the League offices well in advance of the annual meeting - after the First World War, by 10 May each year - and representatives were then able to address the voting members at the meeting for up to three minutes, though, as we shall see, this was dispensed with after 1924. If two applicants received the same number of votes, the unsuccessful applicants withdrew and a second ballot was taken with each club voting just once, and if this was inconclusive the Management Committee made a decision.

At the beginning of the period it seems that many applicants relied on receiving support on the day of the meeting, either through informal canvassing or the formal address to voters. *Athletic News* observed in 1903 the role played by directors at the meeting: 'Hither and thither the representatives of the applying clubs flick about to secure votes, until those who are safe and sound themselves become bored and readily

⁸³ Tischler, *Footballers and Businessmen*, pp. 81-82.

⁸⁴ Tony Arnold, 'Rich Man, Poor Man: Economic Arrangements in the Football League' in Williams and Wagg (eds), *British Football and Social Change*, p. 52.

promise to vote for all and sundry'.⁸⁵ The same newspaper noted two years earlier how 'Personality and a pleasing voice primed with confidence go a long way at a League meeting when a club is applying for membership'. Some speakers, like Henry Walker of Middlesborough and Mr. Cook of Doncaster Rovers, were regarded as expert orators who could elicit support quite successfully.⁸⁶ Other applicants hoped to bolster their claims by enlisting local dignitaries, such as the mayor or MP, to speak on the club's behalf.⁸⁷ Yet although it is undeniable that oratorical skills were an advantage it is unlikely that a good speech would get a poor applicant elected. Indeed, the fact that clubs were increasingly less likely to rely on securing votes at the last moment was underlined by the Management Committee's decision at the 1924 annual meeting to stop application speeches altogether in order to save time. These late appeals, it was felt, were no longer considered necessary 'as the clubs had presumably made up their minds for whom they would vote'.⁸⁸

The minute books of several clubs reveal that long before this time applicants were canvassing voters well in advance of the annual meeting. This was normally done through the distribution of a circular letter advocating the financial, sporting and geographical merits of the applicant. For example, in April 1906 Oldham Athletic issued 250 copies of a circular 'setting out the advantages and claims of this club as a member of the League'.⁸⁹ In common with other clubs, this was supplemented by the personal efforts of club representatives. Both Charles Sutcliffe, who was acting as solicitor to the company and was soon to join the directorate, and the team manager were requested to use their influence at forthcoming meetings of the governing bodies to support Oldham's application.⁹⁰ This attempt failed but in March of the following season the board appointed a special sub-committee to arrange the details relating to the club's next application. This included the distribution throughout the north and midlands of an advertisement in the shape of a football with the inscription 'Oldham

⁸⁵ Report of Football League AGM in *Athletic News*, 1 June 1903.

⁸⁶ Reports of Football League AGMs in *Athletic News*, 20 May 1901; 6 June 1904; George F. Allison, 'The Rise of the Middlesborough FC' in *Book of Football*.

⁸⁷ For examples see *Athletic News*, 1 June 1903 (Southport Central); 5 June 1911 (Grimsby Town); 10 June 1912 and 7 June 1920 (Lincoln City).

⁸⁸ Minutes of Football League, 2 June 1924 (AGM).

⁸⁹ Minutes of Oldham Athletic FC, 19 April 1906.

⁹⁰ Minutes of Oldham Athletic FC, 19 April 1906.

wants League football’, as well as a personal deputation to every voting club.⁹¹ West Ham United similarly sent three directors and the secretary on separate visits to Birmingham, Grimsby, Hull, Lincoln, Nottingham and Coventry in support of its application in 1919.⁹²

Table 2.2 Applications for Football League Membership, 1900-39

Year	Places Available	No. Applications	Year	Places Available	No. Applications
1900	3	7	1922	4	10
1901	3	9	1923	6@	12
1902	3	4	1924	4	4
1903	3	8	1925	4	7
1904	3	5	1926	4	7
1905	7*	8	1927	4	13
1906	3	5	1928	4	11
1907	3	9	1929	4	16
1908	3	6	1930	4	11
1909	2	5	1931	4	10
1910	2	7	1932	4	9
1911	2	7	1933	4	9
1912	2	8	1934	4	5
1913	2	8	1935	4	7
1914	2	8	1936	4	9
1915	2	6	1937	4	8
1919	4*	8	1938	4	not known
1920	22+	25	1939	4	not known
1921	24=	28			

* League expanded by 4 clubs.

+ Third Division of 22 clubs added.

= Third Division Northern Section of 20 clubs added.

@ 2 clubs added to Northern Section.

Sources: Sutcliffe et al., *Football League*, pp. 108-112; Reports of Football League AGMs in *Athletic News*, 5 June 1905, 26 July 1915.

The example of Ipswich Town indicates how sophisticated and expensive applications to the Football League had become by the 1930s. In November 1936, almost six months before the next annual meeting, the board appointed one of its directors to begin ‘propaganda work on behalf of this club with the Football League clubs’ and allocated £200 as an initial sum to a special propaganda account for this purpose.⁹³ In April 1937, the secretary-manager was instructed to apply formally for admission to the third division southern section and to proceed with a brochure for circularisation

⁹¹ Minutes of Oldham Athletic FC, 11 March 1907; Garth Dykes, *Oldham Athletic: Complete Record, 1899-1988*, Derby, 1993; *Athletic News*, 13 May 1907.

⁹² Minutes of West Ham United FC, 25 February 1919.

⁹³ Minutes of Ipswich Town FC, 2 November 1936.

amongst all the League clubs. Though the application proved unsuccessful the club's Finance Committee reported that £340 in total had been expended on the propaganda account.⁹⁴

To have any chance of being elected, then, it was clearly becoming essential to do more than simply state your case: the facts could not be left to speak for themselves. Prior to the 1920 annual meeting, *Athletic News* noted that of the seven candidates for inclusion in the second division only the four who had 'prosecuted an active canvass' had any real hope of success.⁹⁵ The press could be an extremely useful ally in this situation. From at least the late 1900s, sporting and general papers began to seriously discuss the merits of the various candidates and print parts, or the whole, of their circular appeals. *Athletic News* was certainly devoting a considerable amount of space to these appeals on its front page by 1911. It was generally accepted that newspapers were important in publicising a club's case. In 1909 the Sheffield weekly, *Football and Sports Special*, lauded one candidate for its close contact with the press throughout its campaign and contrasted this with the complacency of a rival club: 'we heard practically nothing of what they were doing, or whether they desired any sort of help'.⁹⁶

Many applicants also actively sought the support of influential League clubs or directors. Friends within the League circle could undoubtedly offer practical assistance and give greater weight to the arguments for admission. Middlesborough's election to the second division at the first attempt in 1899 was thought to have been 'thanks to the influence of the Northern delegates'.⁹⁷ Ipswich Town's successful application in 1938 also probably owed a great deal to the personal canvassing of Sir. Samuel Hill-Wood, the Arsenal chairman, on the club's behalf. Hill-Wood was an acquaintance of the Ipswich chairman Captain J. M. Cobbold and had helped in the Suffolk club's preparations the previous season by offering them practical assistance,

⁹⁴ Minutes of Ipswich Town FC, 5 April 1937; Minutes of Ipswich Town FC (Finance Committee), 12 June 1937.

⁹⁵ *Athletic News*, 31 May 1920.

⁹⁶ *Football and Sports Special*, 12 June 1909.

⁹⁷ Allison, 'Rise of Middlesborough FC'.

including a set of tip-up seats for the stadium.⁹⁸ Thus following the announcement of Ipswich's election, the secretary was instructed to write to Hill-Wood 'and thank him for all he had done for this club'.⁹⁹ Some clubs actually approached members of the Management Committee or other League officials directly, even though it was customary for the Committee to remain neutral in the election of clubs. Sutcliffe thus reported in 1920 that certain clubs had contacted him and other Committeemen to test the likelihood of being elected if an application were made.¹⁰⁰ This type of secret activity was particularly common amongst clubs who stood to be heavily fined by, or even expelled from, their respective leagues if a formal application to the Football League was made without due notice.

More seriously, there was clearly a problem throughout the period of candidates offering certain baits or incentives, usually of a financial nature, to voting clubs. Chelsea and Clapton Orient had begun this trend in 1905 by agreeing to pay northern clubs £20 and midland clubs £15 for each visit to London over a period of three years.¹⁰¹ Following similar promises by Fulham two years later several clubs began to feel that such payments constituted a 'bribe', or at the very least gave the payer an unfair advantage, and in 1908 it was resolved that 'no club applying for admission to the League should be allowed to hold out any inducement whatever in the shape of travelling expenses to clubs already holding membership'.¹⁰² It is unlikely, however, that this prevented applicants from offering surreptitious inducements in order to facilitate their election, though there is a lack of solid evidence. The Sheffield United directors were certainly aware of improper conduct on the part of certain candidates during the 1920 elections and subsequently called on the Management Committee to take some action.¹⁰³ It appears that nothing was done because by 1931 the president had to warn non-League clubs again that the practices of 'touting for votes' or 'keeping open house' would be punished in future by disqualification.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁸ Minutes of Ipswich Town FC, 3 May 1937.

⁹⁹ Minutes of Ipswich Town FC, 7 June 1938.

¹⁰⁰ *Athletic News*, 3 May 1920.

¹⁰¹ Report of Football League AGM in *Athletic News*, 5 June 1905; Sutcliffe *et al.*, *Football League*, p. 79.

¹⁰² Report of Football League AGM in *Athletic News*, 1 June 1908.

¹⁰³ Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 1 June 1920.

¹⁰⁴ Minutes of Football League, 1 June 1931 (AGM).

More sinister even than this were allegations that League clubs were being paid to resign their membership. Although the contemporary press and clubs vociferously denied that dishonourable conduct of this kind ever occurred, it is evident that some clubs were so anxious to join the League that they were prepared to pay for the opportunity. A perfect example is Oldham Athletic's admission to the League in June 1907. The club's minutes reveal that on 10 June 1907 the board were informed of the financial difficulties of Burslem Port Vale and agreed to offer that club £1,000, including the transfer of two of its players, 'on their resigning membership of the Football League Ltd., [and] providing this Club is elected to the membership of the said League in their place'.¹⁰⁵ Four days later Port Vale notified the League secretary of their decision and on 15 June Oldham Athletic were elected according to precedent, as they had headed the voting list of unsuccessful candidates at the last annual meeting.¹⁰⁶ There were rumours of a similar arrangement between Stoke and Tottenham Hotspur the following year, even though Stoke publicly announced that their resignation 'had not been influenced in any way by financial inducements from any club desirous of obtaining a position in the League'.¹⁰⁷

Nevertheless, it appears that in the majority of cases there was no hint of any direct financial benefit from supporting one candidate over another. Indirect financial benefit, of course, was an entirely different matter. Contemporary observers certainly believed that financial strength and large potential gates were increasingly becoming the deciding factors in the election of clubs. This is difficult to prove conclusively as voting took place by ballot and therefore the votes of individual clubs, not to mention the reasons behind them, are hard to detect. Club minute books are unfortunately also taciturn on this subject, not least because such decisions were often not decided at board level but instead were discussed informally or left to the club representative's discretion. However, some indication might be provided by studying the type of arguments made by prospective members both at the annual meeting and in the

¹⁰⁵ Minutes of Oldham Athletic FC, 10 June 1907. The club paid Burslem Port Vale £1,150 in total and actually had to take out an overdraft of £400 to do so. Minutes, 12, 13 June 1907.

¹⁰⁶ *Manchester Evening News*, 14 June 1907.

¹⁰⁷ *Birmingham Sporting Mail*, 20 June 1908. Also see the account in Julian Holland, *Spurs: A History of Tottenham Hotspur Football Club*, London, 1957, pp. 74-75.

printed circulars which had become commonplace by the mid-1900s. It is firstly important to distinguish between clubs applying for re-election and those outside the League seeking to gain entry, as they tended to employ distinct forms of reasoning. The main tactic of the first group was, not surprisingly, to stress their long connection with, and loyalty to, the League. For the major clubs who rarely finished in the bottom two or three of the lowest division this was a fairly straightforward matter. Thus Burnley's representative in 1903 promised that the club 'would not offend again' while Nottingham Forest's appeal for readmission in 1914 was based entirely on its 'long and honourable career' and past contribution to the League.¹⁰⁸ But for a club like Lincoln City, which was regularly required to justify its League place, the need to evoke a sense of tradition and loyalty became crucial. A typical example was the club's circular appeal of 1911 which stated that 'Our connection with the League has extended over eighteen years and during that period all the duties and obligations of League membership have been honourably fulfilled'. It was mentioned, in addition, that 'we are also one of the oldest clubs in the country'.¹⁰⁹

The approach of non-League clubs was completely different. They clearly had more to prove and thus tended to adopt more substantial and wider-ranging arguments. Oldham Athletic's circular appeal of 1907 (shown in full in Appendix 5) was characteristic of the type of document sent to the club electorate. It began by stating that the intention of the document was

to lay before you the reasons why we consider our admittance will be beneficial not only to the League, but to Association Football, its followers and supporters generally; with the object of gaining your assistance and support at the Annual Meeting of the League.

It then covered a number of areas in which the club was presented as either reaching the necessary standards or offering something extra to the League. Firstly, the population within the town, the parliamentary borough, and a five and ten mile radius were stated, together with details of its geographical accessibility and transport facilities. Secondly, emphasis was placed on the pedigree and record of the team in

¹⁰⁸ Reports of Football League AGMs in *Athletic News*, 1 June 1903, 1 June 1914.

¹⁰⁹ Lincoln City FC Election Circular, quoted in *Athletic News*, 22 May 1911.

their present league competition and in the FA Cup. Thirdly, the club's ability to attract good crowds - 'we have been able to obtain 8,000 spectators regularly' - and its ground capacity and facilities were noted. Fourthly, the financial basis and security of the club were outlined and, finally, the document stressed the role of the club in popularising the association code in the area, with the intimation that election would quicken and strengthen this progress.¹¹⁰ By the end of the 1900s this type of format had become a blueprint for non-League candidates. Of course, clubs naturally placed greater emphasis on what they considered their strong points to be - whether playing record, ground facilities or finances - but few chose to deviate from the general pattern. Some circulars, like that accompanying Huddersfield Town's application in 1910, were especially meticulous. In addition to the standard contents, the Huddersfield board included a report by the renowned engineer and architect Archibald Leitch on the proposed development of the ground, along with a sketch of the ground, and even a list of railway tariffs for travelling teams and spectators.¹¹¹

The importance of adequate railway facilities deserves special attention here. While it seems too prescriptive to suggest that the growth of the League retraced the growth of the national railway system, there was undoubtedly a close link between the two. As James Catton remarked in 1919:

What has been made the first point urged in any application for membership of The Football League? The ease with which visiting clubs could get to the new centre and away from it. If the proposed new centre was served by several railway companies and linked with various lines the facts weighed with those who had cast their votes.¹¹²

For all clubs, a good railway link became an essential prerequisite for admission; for some, it was the main selling-point. Those located at the extremities of the country were especially anxious to pacify the concerns of the existing members over possible transport difficulties. Darlington based each annual application to the League between

¹¹⁰ Oldham Athletic Circular to Clubs in support of Application for Admission to the Football League, April 1907. (Thanks to Garth Dykes for this reference).

¹¹¹ Huddersfield Town FC Election Circular, quoted in *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 28 April 1910. The work and influence of Archibald Leitch is discussed in Inglis, *Football Grounds*, especially pp. 16-18.

¹¹² *Athletic News*, 13 October 1919.

1910 and 1914 on the town's position at 'the centre of the North-Eastern Railway system'. It was also emphasised that the 'North-Eastern Railway Company are making [Darlington] their headquarters, and are transferring their works from Gateshead and York'.¹¹³ Though not a 'railway town' in the same sense as Darlington, Carlisle United's successful 1928 circular noted that the town was 'one of the best served railway centres in the British Isles'. York City's address to electors in the same year stated that the city was 'situated on the main line between London and Newcastle served by a railway service second to none'.¹¹⁴ Furthermore, as the railway network expanded in the first two decades of the century, and competition between companies increased¹¹⁵, so most club grounds became served by two or more stations or lines (see Appendix 6). For example, clubs or supporters destined for either of the Bradford clubs in 1910 could travel on the Midland, the North Eastern, the Lancashire and Yorkshire, the Great Northern or the Great Central Railways. Ten years later a connection had been added by the London and North Western Railway.

Until the 1920s there were no minimum standards or requirements for entry laid down by the League, although it seems likely that member clubs judged applicants according to their own informal criteria. This changed with the formation of the third division, and particularly the northern section, which was thought by many to include a number of unknown clubs with unproven track records. At the 1920 annual meeting the Management Committee had postponed the formation of a northern section for one season because it felt that the suggested clubs were 'not strong enough both financially and in playing strength'.¹¹⁶ This uncertainty led the following season to the Committee vetting all applications for the first time, through a process of ground inspections and questionnaires. Prospective candidates were required to have dressing rooms with proper facilities attached to their grounds and suitable accommodation for officials rather than the haphazard arrangement of changing at hotels and the like

¹¹³ Darlington FC Election Circular, quoted in *Athletic News*, 8 May 1911. Darlington were not admitted into the League until 1921 as part of the newly-formed third division northern section.

¹¹⁴ Carlisle United FC and York City FC Election Circulars, quoted in *Athletic News*, 4 June 1928. York were elected to the third division the following season.

¹¹⁵ See P. J. Cain, 'Railways 1870-1914: the maturity of the private system' in Michael J. Freeman and Derek H. Aldcroft (eds), *Transport in Victorian Britain*, Manchester, 1988, pp. 115-18.

¹¹⁶ Minutes of Football League, 29 May 1920.

which was prevalent at the time.¹¹⁷ In addition, the Management Committee sent each candidate a list of questions ‘which are so searching as to obtain complete information with reference to applying clubs’. It inquired into the condition and status of the club; its financial position and future prospects; the gate money received; and the nature and holding capacity of the ground, enclosure and stands, while *Athletic News* advised candidates to add details concerning the size of the local population and catchment area.¹¹⁸ Again in 1924 the Management Committee examined the credentials of outside applicants and recommended only those clubs that were felt to reach the necessary standards. But it was not until 1927 that these entry qualifications finally became formalised. Thereafter, applicants were required to supply the Committee and clubs with balance sheets from the previous two seasons, details of the members and shareholders, average attendances for both first and second team fixtures and particulars of the ground capacity, location and dressing-room facilities.¹¹⁹

The impression given in both the circular appeals and these more formal guidelines is that the financial strength and potential of clubs underpinned the whole election system. In particular, the population of the town, city or area of the club was regarded by observers in the press as the decisive factor in the selection of one candidate over another. As early as the 1905 annual meeting, *Athletic News* noted that ‘the tone was of big populations and money’. At the same time, Lewis stressed his objection ‘to the elbowing out of old clubs to make room for new ones with no recommendations but money, and the fact that they are in bigger centres of population’.¹²⁰ In November 1911, *Athletic News* again reported the opinion of an ex-club director that ‘no town of less than a population of 250,000 could run a first-class professional team’, although the paper then went on to list seven first division clubs situated in towns of less than 200,000 and a further two in less than 100,000.¹²¹ Certainly the 1900s and early 1910s saw the replacement of a number of small town clubs with those from larger industrial centres. As Appendix 7 shows, there were dramatic changes in the composition of the League, as relatively new clubs from Bristol, London and the West

¹¹⁷ Sheffield United FC Programme, 6 September 1920.

¹¹⁸ Minutes of Football League, 10 January 1921; *Athletic News*, 17 January 1921.

¹¹⁹ Minutes of Football League, 12 May 1924; 8 April 1927 (SGM); Sutcliffe *et al.*, *Football League*, p. 99.

¹²⁰ Report of Football League AGM in *Athletic News*, 5 June 1905; *Athletic News*, 24 April 1905.

¹²¹ *Athletic News*, 6 November 1911.

Riding of Yorkshire were admitted in place of their counterparts in places like Loughborough, Burton and Gainsborough. In the five years between 1903 and 1908 alone, four clubs from the capital had been elected together with two clubs from Bradford, England's eighth largest city, and one from the fifth largest, Leeds.¹²² Clubs were undoubtedly less conservative in their voting than they had been in the early years and were often accused of being unsympathetic to the claims of those seeking re-election. As Stoke's H. D. Austerberry told his fellow representatives in 1908:

the face of football politics had vastly changed during the past few years, and whether they wished it or not, they knew very well that a little struggling club that came to the annual meeting and applied for admission would not stand the slightest chance.¹²³

Tottenham Hotspur's election in place of Lincoln City in 1908 is perhaps the best illustration of this tendency. Tischler has used this case to exemplify the way in which the poorer clubs from smaller cities were unceremoniously discarded in favour of wealthier and better situated clubs. He quotes the opinion of a writer in a Lincoln newspaper who saw it as contemptible that the club 'should go under before the encroachment of clubs with their ignoble and sole consideration of the "big purse"'.¹²⁴ Clearly there was an element of this but the reality was far more complex. Tottenham had an impressive playing record both in the Southern League and the FA Cup, which they actually won in 1901, whereas Lincoln had finished in the bottom three on a number of occasions, including the two previous seasons. *Athletic News* believed that Lincoln had received sufficient 'warning' and had appealed for help too often: 'The members of the League can grow tired of re-electing a club in an age where the tendency is to concentrate the best professional football in the largest centres'. In addition, it was noted that the widespread feeling that Lincoln acted as a nursery club for Chelsea may have lost it considerable support.¹²⁵ In contrast, the press generally agreed that Tottenham were a more attractive side who would draw large crowds and

¹²² See Arnold, 'Belated Entry', pp. 326-27.

¹²³ Report of Football League AGM in *Athletic News*, 1 June 1908.

¹²⁴ Tischler, *Footballers and Businessmen*, p. 82.

¹²⁵ *Athletic News*, 8 July 1908.

could easily survive in either division. 'Whilst feeling much sympathy with Lincoln', opined a writer in the *Birmingham Sporting Mail*, 'I cannot help thinking that the presence of a powerful club like Tottenham will be for the general advantage of the competition'.¹²⁶ The *Yorkshire Post* agreed that 'Tottenham always play good football and they will be an attraction wherever they play'.¹²⁷

The benefit of voting for clubs likely to attract large attendances became more obvious with the introduction of gate pooling during the war. From 1919 the home club was obliged to pay 20 per cent of its gate to the visitors, which meant that the home gates of applicants as well as their drawing power away from home became significant. Thus, two clubs from huge industrial conurbations, Leeds United and Cardiff City, were convincingly elected to the first division in that year ahead of well established rivals. *Athletic News* backed the cause of the outside applicants unreservedly:

In these days of big towns' football and gate sharing, the claims of Cardiff City and Leeds United stand out pre-eminently. League football in these great centres would be a source of strength to the fellow members. The proposition needs no argument. Sentiment is one thing; practicality is another. League football is more and more a matter of revenue.¹²⁸

The point had been put even more explicitly following the admission of Coventry City, West Ham United, South Shields and Rotherham County the previous March:

The election was decided, whether consciously or not, on the doctrine of the survival of the fittest. Financial fitness was the test. The League cannot afford to carry clubs which need help... Obligations to players and the cost of football generally in the future imposes a burden that can only be met by those clubs which will be powerful allies, and which are likely to hand over substantial cheques to the visitors. Little doles as between club and club... will be of no use in the days to come.¹²⁹

During the 1920s good gates appeared to assure League status regardless of on-field performances. James Catton, for example, argued in 1923 that Aberdare Athletic

¹²⁶ *Birmingham Sporting Mail*, 4 July 1908.

¹²⁷ Quoted in Simmons, *Tottenham Hotspur*, p. 75.

¹²⁸ *Athletic News*, 24 May 1920.

¹²⁹ *Athletic News*, 17 March 1919.

deserved re-election 'as their gates have been excellent, in spite of reverses, and they have more than paid their way'.¹³⁰ The electorate evidently agreed because Aberdare were duly re-elected without a single dissident. The question of gate money was probably also significant in Oldham Athletic's decision in 1939 to support a non-League candidate in the event of Hartlepool United finishing in the last two of the third division northern section. Hartlepool had, after all, attracted Oldham's lowest crowds both home and away that season.¹³¹

Throughout the inter-war period, however, voting clubs became less willing than before to change the composition of either section of the third division. After 1922 the Management Committee agreed to allow each third division group to recommend the clubs to be elected, a recommendation which would then 'carry weight with the League in any decisions arrived at'.¹³² Invariably self-protection and group loyalty led to support for the retiring members at the expense of outside applicants. In the northern section, for example, Barrow finished bottom on four occasions between 1923/24 and 1929/30 but were re-elected every time. Sometimes the full members decided to ignore the wishes of their lower brethren, as when Aberdare Athletic were narrowly voted out in 1927, but in the main the first and second division members favoured maintaining the status quo. This policy generated severe press criticism, particularly from *Athletic News*, which accused the League of turning itself into a 'close corporation' for which 'no outsiders need apply'. In one particularly strong attack it condemned the League's 'narrow, unprogressive policy' of re-electing the bottom clubs, which automatically ruled out 'ambitious centres, and possibly stronger centres'.¹³³ In response, the Committee continually denied any intention of closing the door to aspiring clubs: they 'wanted the strongest competitions, but the clubs of the Third Division should know what was best for themselves'.¹³⁴ In 1929 the collusive, self-perpetuating policy of the third division was exposed by revelations that representatives of the two retiring clubs had been present throughout the southern section's private meeting and that the recommendation to the full members was

¹³⁰ Catton Folders, B, Newspaper cutting on Aberdare and Frank Bradshaw, 7 May 1923, p. 153.

¹³¹ Minutes of Oldham Athletic FC, 3 May 1939.

¹³² Minutes of Football League (Third Division Southern Section SGM), 6 March 1922.

¹³³ *Athletic News*, 4 June 1928. Also see 12 March 1928.

¹³⁴ Minutes of Football League, 30 May 1927 (AGM).

decided not by secret ballot but a show of hands. Under the circumstances, one non-League club official regarded the whole affair as 'a waste of time'; *Athletic News* considered such action to be conservative, selfish and 'all too sentimental'.¹³⁵

While money, crowds and 'sentiment' were thus all important in the election of clubs, geographical and strategic factors cannot be ignored. At the beginning of the period, in particular, there is some evidence that the League, either at Management Committee level or through the collective wishes of the clubs, made a conscious effort to extend its boundaries by penetrating areas of rugby league dominance. One author has referred to the 'aggressive recruitment' of clubs from these areas and another suggests that by the early 1900s the League had begun plotting 'the colonization of England at the expense of every other rival organization in both football and rugby'.¹³⁶ The bare facts seem to support these statements: Bradford in 1903, Leeds City and Hull in 1905, Oldham Athletic and Bradford Park Avenue in 1907 and Huddersfield Town in 1910 were all drawn from towns with both deep rugby traditions and strong rival Northern Union clubs. Moreover, in each of these clubs' applications for membership much emphasis was placed on local competition between the two codes. For instance, the Bradford Park Avenue representative supported his claim by declaring that the club's decision to take up the Association code 'meant the extinction of Northern Unionism... in Yorkshire'.¹³⁷ Indeed, even Grimsby Town's election circular of 1911 played the rugby 'card', stating that 'Grimsby is being threatened with an invasion by the Northern Rugby Union. By having League football... this invasion can be stopped altogether'.¹³⁸

Whether all this constituted a strategic policy on the League's part is less clear. There were certainly some suggestions that 'undue influence' had been put on clubs by the Management Committee to vote for Bradford City in 1903 and the local press were also convinced that assurances had been made by the League to admit Bradford as early as February, before the club had even been formally constituted.¹³⁹ The club's

¹³⁵ *Athletic News*, 20 May 1929.

¹³⁶ Williams, *The Code War*, p. 125; Inglis, *League Football*, p. 56.

¹³⁷ *Manchester Evening News*, 31 May 1907.

¹³⁸ Grimsby Town FC Election Circular, quoted in *Athletic News*, 8 May 1911.

¹³⁹ *Athletic News*, 1 June 1903; Arnold, *A Game That Would Pay*, p. 25.

success in securing the highest vote at the annual meeting, eleven more than founder members Burnley, lends weight to the collusion theory. And it has been suggested that two years later Leeds City was also given 'private undertakings' by the League that its application would be successful.¹⁴⁰ But it must be remembered that clubs ultimately voted on a free and individual basis and thus the extent to which they could be directed by the wishes of the Committee or any other party was strictly limited. This was evident in the failed application of the amateur London-based Argonauts club in 1928. Some five months before the annual meeting, R. W. Sloley, the founder and representative of Argonauts, met the FA secretary Frederick Wall and then the League executive to discuss the possible admission of the club. Wall informed Sloley of his belief that the League 'would regard the application favourably' and the Committee itself told him that while 'the matter was one which the Clubs would have to decide... they would welcome such a club'.¹⁴¹ In addition, *Athletic News* noted in late May that 'an emphatic impression, decidedly favourable to the amateur club, has been created in Football League circles' by the Argonauts decision to play at Wembley Stadium rather than at White City.¹⁴² Yet despite this apparent backing, the club was easily defeated with only 17 votes in the election ballot.

In the same way it is doubtful whether the election of clubs from London or the south of England was linked to any broad policy initiative. Certain members of the Management Committee and club directors may indeed have wanted to establish a broader base for the Football League in the south but, as we have seen in relation to the Southern League, individual enmities and jealousies tended to preclude the achievement of this sort of long-term goal. The pattern of Welsh membership is also better explained by changing economic fortunes than by any overarching central policy. Thus while in the early 1920s there were six Welsh clubs in the League drawing relatively good gates, by the early 1930s severe economic depression and unemployment in the coalfields of South Wales had necessitated the replacement of

¹⁴⁰ See Arnold, 'Belated Entry', pp. 326-27.

¹⁴¹ *Athletic News*, 2 January 1928; Minutes of Football League, 16 January 1928. Sutcliffe's interpretation of the meeting was slightly different. The Committee, in his view, had informed Sloley that they 'would show no prejudice' against the Argonauts but 'could make no guarantees'. *Topical Times*, 28 January 1928.

¹⁴² *Athletic News*, 21 May 1928.

Aberdare Athletic and Merthyr Town and the temporary exclusion of Newport County.¹⁴³ In such circumstances, the search for any clear policy or strategy is ultimately futile. We can never know for sure what went on at the annual meeting or in private discussions, and clubs were rarely prepared to discuss such issues in the press. If a recognisable policy developed here, as it appears to have done during the 1900s, it probably did so informally through the private agreement of club representatives rather than the initiative of the executive.

In addition, more localised geographical factors could have a bearing. This occurred in London especially, where the proposed admission of a new club invariably led to opposition from existing members anxious not to lose spectators. Hence, both Fulham and Tottenham faced strenuous opposition from League clubs in the capital when they applied for admission and, nearly twenty years later, Brentford and Queen's Park Rangers formally objected to the provisional arrangement for Argonauts to play 'so near at hands' at White City.¹⁴⁴ The West Ham board, amongst others, agreed not to support the Argonauts 'in view of the position of other West London clubs'.¹⁴⁵ The East London club became embroiled in a particularly bitter dispute in 1930 with neighbouring third division applicants Thames FC. In a circular letter to first and second division clubs, the West Ham board contended that Thames was merely a subsidiary company of the West Ham Greyhound Racecourse organisation and was, moreover, £3,000 in debt. Thames denied these allegations and demanded a withdrawal and though they were subsequently elected on the back of the southern section's recommendation, the first division club's circular undoubtedly cost them a number of votes.¹⁴⁶ Furthermore, there are hints that other more complicated motives were at play during election time. According to *Athletic News*, it was actually known for members to consciously vote for weak playing sides or 'clubs which they could

¹⁴³ Gareth Williams, 'From Grand Slam to Great Slump: Economy, Society and Rugby Football in Wales during the depression', *Welsh History Review*, 11, 3, 1983, pp. 346-48. The gates at most of the Welsh clubs dropped drastically in this period. Cardiff City, cup finalists in 1925 and winners in 1927, had attendances of just 2,000 by the time it had been relegated down to the third division south in 1931/32 and Merthyr Town was reportedly only able to give visiting clubs £1 as their share of the gate by the time the club was voted out of the League in 1930.

¹⁴⁴ *Manchester Evening News*, 8 May 1907; *Athletic News*, 29 June 1908; Minutes of Football League, 30-31 March 1928.

¹⁴⁵ Minutes of West Ham United FC, 20 March 1928.

¹⁴⁶ *Athletic News*, 26 May, 2 June 1930.

keep below them' so as to ensure their own status.¹⁴⁷ This may explain the habitual re-election of some struggling clubs at the beginning of the period and then again during the 1920s and 1930s.

4. Conclusion

In the course of two decades the Football League was transformed from an organisation based around professional clubs in the north and midlands of England to a national body, with a membership encompassing an entire southern division, ten London clubs and even four representatives from Wales. Yet the road to a national league did not consist of a series of ordered steps undertaken with a clear end in sight: there was never a consensus either within the League executive or amongst its member clubs favouring expansion on a national scale and so the growth of the League was largely piecemeal and *ad hoc*, its trajectory uncertain. Sutcliffe, in particular, has sometimes been lauded as an empire-builder; the mastermind behind each stage of the League's expansion who remained wedded throughout to the ultimate goal of a huge, multi-divisional national body. But the 'little lawyer' was, like many others, really an opportunist who was able in 1920 to successfully tap into the discontent of the Southern League clubs and to present the idea of the national league as the culmination of the hard work and achievements of the Football League members, and a reflection of their superior status and financial and playing strength.

Along with the major stages of expansion, the Football League's membership was under constant modification through the end-of-season election process. The preceding discussion has shown that while the guarantees of large crowds and financial security were probably the most important criteria for the inclusion of new members, they remained part of a broader collage of interlocking motives and interests which vied for prominence in the minds of club representatives. Above all it is crucial to recognise that the Football League executive did not have the power, as American sports bodies and team owners did, to discard a club and move it to another city when it had ceased to be a financial benefit to the competition, even if some of

¹⁴⁷ *Athletic News*, 13 November 1911.

the exits and entries of members during the first decade of the century do hint at an informal franchise system. Clubs were elected and voted out by the membership, whose decisions could be influenced by local connections, loyalty and even straightforward sympathy. Certainly the continual re-election of bottom-of-the-table sides and the third division's operation of a virtual 'closed shop' for much of the inter-war period went against the grain of simple economic considerations and can only be understood in terms of these broader motivating factors.

CHAPTER THREE

'AN UNRULY BOY IN THE HOUSE':

THE LEAGUE'S RELATIONS WITH THE FA

For some years, as the League grew in strength and power, some of us at the Football Association were not too easy in our minds with such a big, and, as we sometimes thought, unruly boy in the house. But, today, I look upon the League as a strong arm and reliable ally at the service of the national body. Any fears that we had have proved groundless.

The League and all connected with it have the welfare of the game at heart, and realise the importance of one control over it. We are,... and I am sure always will be, a happy family party.

William Pickford, FA President, in a speech given at the Football League's Jubilee celebrations in 1938.¹

... the League and the FA have been laying about each other for the best part of a century. It is a cold war, of course. No triggers are squeezed, no blood is ever drawn, but it is a war which has been spitting away ever since the Football Association's muddled attitude to professionalism back in the 1880s led to the birth of the Football League.

Hardaker, *Hardaker of the League*, p. 126.

In their eagerness to contextualise the development of professional sport by relating it to wider trends in society, historians have tended to pay insufficient attention to the internal dynamics and conflicts which have always existed within and between ruling bodies. A thorough understanding of the administrative structure of football is particularly necessary as the game was effectively governed from the late nineteenth-century not by a single unified body but by two distinct organisations - the Football Association and the Football League. Certainly, the distinct origins and identities of the two have generally been recognised by academics, even if this has sometimes been presented as a rather crude antithesis between south and north, amateurism and professionalism and upper-middle versus entrepreneurial middle-class.² What has generally been overlooked in previous accounts, however, is the fact that power relations between the League and the FA have not been historically static but subject to considerable change over time. Indeed it will be argued in this chapter that by 1910, when the FA handed to the League formal control over the financial dealings between its clubs and players, relations between the two were no longer those of

¹ Printed as an introduction in Sutcliffe *et al.*, *Football League*.

² See Tomlinson, 'North and South', p. 26; Wagg, *Football World*, pp. 6-7, 30.

parent to son but of brothers, with the younger League increasingly independent and often able to dictate to its elder sibling.

This chapter will focus briefly on the contrasting functions and responsibilities of the two bodies, and then consider the League's relations with the governing body in two distinct periods: first, the era marked by conflicts over the transfer system and the payment of players which lasted from the creation of the League in 1888 to 1910; and second, the thirty years from 1910 until the Second World War, which witnessed the development of the League as an increasingly powerful and autonomous representative of professional football within the broader authority of the FA.

1. The League and the FA: Functions and Responsibilities

From a strictly theoretical standpoint, the functions and responsibilities of the League and the FA are easy to differentiate. Founded in 1863 - a quarter of a century before the League - the FA was instrumental in codifying and standardising the laws of the game. From its early years it also concerned itself with the development of the national FA Cup competition, established in 1871, and the organisation of the national team. In addition, the FA was responsible for the administration of the game as a whole: from the grass roots level of junior, district and county associations through to professional football. Acting as an umbrella body, it authorised competitions and leagues throughout the country, including the Football League. Thus, in theory, the League acted only in accordance with, and under the licence of, the FA, annually applying to the FA Leagues Sanction Committee for permission simply to continue or to alter its own constitution. From the start, the FA's position as the supreme football authority in the country was therefore widely recognised: Geoffrey Green has, at different times, called it 'the monarchy' and 'the highest parliament in English football'.³

League officials publicly acknowledged this position from the beginning, even if some club directors harboured private ambitions to wrest control of the professional game

³ Green, *History of the FA*, p. 391; 'The Football Association' in Fabian and Green (eds), *Association Football*, vol. 1, p. 47.

from the FA. William McGregor soon realised that 'when the League meet, they are actuated by the interests of the League clubs. The general good of the game is not their chief concern' and hence that 'it is best for the whole government of the game to be in the hands of the Football Association'.⁴ Another future League president, Charles Sutcliffe, made the point more succinctly: 'In football the FA is omnipotent. It is a dominating, while the League is a subservient, body.' In a separate article he compared the governing powers of the FA to those of the MCC in cricket and the Jockey Club in horse racing.⁵ In practice, however, relations were considerably more complex. The respective functions of the two bodies were never delineated at birth nor enshrined in any joint agreement but remained contingent upon their changing power relations. Hence as the League grew in size, prestige and power it became increasingly difficult to avoid conflicts of authority and jurisdiction. Moreover, although the League saw its role as limited to 'look[ing] after its own affairs'⁶, this desire for self-government created inevitable contention with the FA, as the bodies shared the membership of clubs and the registration of players. League interests also extended beyond its own competition to the FA Cup and the international team, for which it contributed the premier clubs and the majority of players: in fact, after 1920 almost every full England international was employed by a Football League club. By the Second World War, then, the League was hardly a subordinate body: it had emerged 'much more in the position of a central control over the business and financial side of football than... the Association'.⁷

Notwithstanding the emphasis placed by commentators on the 'two distinct spheres of operation for League and Association'⁸, lines of authority were often unclear and relations muddled. This was evident, firstly, in relation to the registration of players. Players were obliged to register with both the FA and the Football League before being eligible to play in League competition (see chapter 5). Yet there was no standard procedure for registration and often players did not sign concurrently with the two bodies. Indeed, in 1931 McKenna and other League officials revealed to an

⁴ McGregor, 'The League', p. 174.

⁵ *Athletic News*, 30 January, 9 October 1911.

⁶ McGregor, 'Origin and Future', p. 6.

⁷ 'The Football Industry - 1', *Planning*, 17, 1951, p. 163.

⁸ *Athletic News*, 20 March 1905.

FA standing committee that since its inception the League had permitted member clubs to register and transfer professionals who were not on the FA's books, although FA registration was always secured before the professional played a match. While this was unknown to all committee members 'other than the League representatives', the League was nevertheless given permission to continue the practice.⁹ There were also some inconsistencies in the cancellation of registration forms. Generally the League acted in accordance with the governing body by terminating the registration of players who had been suspended or otherwise de-registered by the former while, conversely, the FA scrapped the agreements and registration forms of players found guilty under League rules of 'palpable inefficiency' (see chapter 5).¹⁰ In 1929, however, following Oldham's attempt to sign a player still registered with Bolton, the Management Committee informed clubs that 'cancellation of forms by the FA does not affect the Football League form signed by the player'.¹¹ Such an assertion of autonomy on the League's part was not uncommon and often led to considerable confusion among clubs and players who were subject to this dual system of authority.

The on-field discipline of footballers certainly came more clearly within the FA's sphere of responsibility. Initially the League 'assumed the right' to deal with issues of misconduct and indiscipline on as well as off the pitch but this did not last long.¹² The main problem was that individual club interests could compromise the necessary even-handedness of any League disciplinary forum, especially as the first conferences involved representatives of *all* the member clubs. Thus the League and its clubs soon restricted their role to reporting disciplinary offences to the FA, and in late 1899 the FA Council explicitly stated that 'League Committees must not deal with offences committed on the field of play by their own Clubs and players, or inflict punishments.'¹³ From this point on, discipline was widely acknowledged as the

⁹ Minutes of FA Rules Revision Committee, 30 November 1931. The FA had passed a resolution in 1894 to ensure that all players signed FA registration forms before signing club agreements or League forms and in 1900 had recommended that 'League registrations shall be concurrent with registrations with the FA' but neither initiative appears to have been followed in practice. Green, *History of the FA*, p. 404; FA 'Transfer of Players': Further Report, 15 April 1900.

¹⁰ See Minutes of Football League, 31 May 1924; FA Report of the Rules Revision Committee and the Leagues Sanction Committee on Powers to Terminate Agreements Between Clubs and Players, July 1913.

¹¹ Minutes of Football League, 18 February 1929.

¹² Sutcliffe *et al.*, *Football League*, p. 4.

¹³ Minutes of FA Council, 18 December 1899.

prerogative of the governing body: indeed *Athletic News* was confident that the League would never consider threatening the FA's 'impartial control' in this area.¹⁴ As we shall see later, the respective duties of the League and FA were less clearly defined in relation to the broader issues of misconduct and breach of rules by clubs and officials. But between the wars co-operation was formalised in this area, too, with joint inquiries and commissions established to tackle the most serious cases.

It is also noteworthy that only FA Cup ties, replays and England international matches were allowed to disrupt the otherwise sacrosanct Football League programme. Moreover, the FA theoretically controlled the schedule for the League's own representative fixtures and club tours, although they rarely denied permission for such matches to be played. Nonetheless, the League Management Committee and the clubs were obliged on every occasion to make formal applications to the FA Council, an arrangement which clearly led to underlying resentment in Preston and a degree of confusion amongst the clubs. In 1900, for example, the FA avoided a potential dispute with the League by eventually sanctioning the scheduled Scottish Inter-League match, while at the same time asserting its authority by informing the League that in future the fixture could not be played 'within a month' of the England-Scotland international.¹⁵ Member clubs were slow to recognise that only the FA could officially sanction continental tours, even though from 1912 the League itself required details of the financial arrangements.¹⁶ Usually the FA simply rubber-stamped such requests but occasionally it could use its sanction as a punitive device. Hence Wolverhampton Wanderers was prevented from touring the continent during the summer of 1937 because of its poor disciplinary record over the previous two seasons.¹⁷

The financial well-being of the two bodies was fundamentally interlocked from the 1890s onwards. The FA's income has always depended 'primarily on the activities of

¹⁴ *Athletic News*, 20 March 1905.

¹⁵ Minutes of FA Consultative Committee, 8 October 1900; Minutes of FA Council, 12 November 1900.

¹⁶ Minutes of Football League, 9 August 1912; 20 December 1920, 7 March 1921.

¹⁷ Minutes of FA Council, 30 April 1937.

professional football'¹⁸, principally through international and FA Cup matches. While accurate figures for the pre-First World War period are difficult to find, it appears that the bulk of the FA's revenue was derived from the gate receipts of the Cup semi-finals and final and, to a lesser extent, the international fixtures with Scotland, Wales and Ireland. Increasingly, however, it was considered unfair that the successful Cup semi-finalists should be asked to bear 'practically the whole cost of running the Football Association'¹⁹ and so from the early 1900s the FA levied 5 per cent on the gate income of all matches from the first round to the fourth. After this stage, the governing body took one-third of the net receipts of the semi-finals and the final and divided the remainder between the competing clubs in both subsequent rounds. In 1909 the FA received £3,353 from international matches and nearly £4,000 from the Cup semi-finals and final out of total receipts of £18,959. In contrast, the 1926 balance sheet shows that £14,360 was taken via percentages from the Cup competition and over £8,000 from international matches, including a record £5,867 derived from the Scotland fixture at Old Trafford. Certainly by the mid-1920s the FA was a relatively rich organisation, with assets of £66,544 in 1924 compared with a League sum of just £10,618.²⁰ League representatives criticised what they saw as the FA's obsession with creating a large investment fund and pointed out that 'many of the clubs who are taking part in the Cup competition could ill-afford and could do with the percentage that was taken from them'.²¹ Indeed in 1946 a Football League deputation explicitly indicated its dissatisfaction 'that prior to the war the assets of The Football Association increased annually' with little or no concomitant benefit to its member clubs.²² The FA's dependence on cup and international gate receipts had been shown clearly during the war period when, in the absence of both these sources of income, the League stepped in with a direct grant of £1,000 to offset the FA's debts.²³ The tables were turned somewhat between the wars. The FA claimed, rather vaguely, that it had 'always responded' to specific appeals by the League in this period. More specifically, there is evidence that it agreed in 1937, after consultation with the League, to contribute £5,446 from its Benevolent Fund to pay off the deficit

¹⁸ PEP, *English Professional Football*, 32, 496, 1966, Appendix 4.

¹⁹ *Athletic News*, 15 January 1906.

²⁰ *Football and Sports Special*, 5 June 1909; *Athletic News*, 31 May 1926, 26 May 1924.

²¹ Report of FA AGM in *Athletic News*, 9 June 1924.

²² Green, *History of the FA*, p. 393.

of the Football League Mutual Insurance Federation and a further £660 annually from the receipts of replayed Cup ties for the next four years (see chapter 6).²⁴

2. Amateurs Versus Professionals: The Struggle for Control over Professional Football, 1888-1910

It is important to recognise that relations between the Football League and the FA in the early twentieth century were fundamentally shaped by the whole debate over amateur and professional football. Various historical studies have established that the legalisation of professionalism in 1885 was less an attempt by the FA to embrace the phenomenon than to restrain and control it.²⁵ Indeed, stringent birth and residential qualifications were initially imposed on professional players, although these were soon relaxed and by 1889 had been abolished entirely.²⁶ Yet the FA still intended to 'keep professionalism at arm's length'²⁷ through the barring of professionals from club or association committees and the inauguration of a separate amateur cup tournament (in 1893). In these circumstances, it is hardly surprising that the Football League was effectively marginalised at first by the governing body. When Charles Alcock, an old Harrovian and secretary of Surrey County Cricket Club as well as the FA, published his *Football Annual* for 1890, the League merited only a paragraph of copy along with the final championship table. In contrast, the activities of the provincial associations occupied 27 pages while the results and descriptions of public school football and rugby took a full 30 pages. And though he recognised that the League system was 'not without its advantages', Alcock warned that 'if carried to excess, as it undoubtedly is in many parts, [it] is calculated to do harm to, rather than benefit the game'.²⁸

²³ Sutcliffe *et al.*, *Football League*, p. 23.

²⁴ Green, *History of the FA*, p. 393; Minutes of FA Finance and General Purposes Committee, 8 March 1937.

²⁵ See Mason, *Association Football*, chapter 1; Tischler, *Footballers and Businessmen*, pp. 51-59; Holt, *Sport and the British*, pp. 106-07.

²⁶ Vamplew, *Pay Up*, p. 192, Appendix 2d; Young, *History of British Football*, pp. 173-74.

²⁷ Holt, *Sport and the British*, p. 106.

²⁸ Dobbs, *Edwardians at Play*, pp. 45-46.

The struggle over professionalisation, and the establishment of the Football League as its monument, certainly created deep divisions within the amateur elite which ran the FA, leading in 1890 to the resignation of the Old Etonian president Major Marindin and five vice-presidents from southern amateur clubs in reaction to the aforementioned abolition of the 'stringent conditions' on professionals. Equally, representatives of the League clubs were undoubtedly more numerous and prominent on the FA Council by the mid-1890s.²⁹ Despite this, the amateur-professional tensions did not disappear with the arrival of northern administrators like chairman Charles Clegg, a Sheffield solicitor, and Birmingham's Charles Crump, at the higher echelons of the FA. In fact, Clegg and Crump differed from those they replaced in terms of tactics rather than sentiment. They were still amateurs first and foremost but were prepared to tolerate the Football League providing it recognised its inferior status and subordinated itself to the FA's absolute rule.

From the beginning, then, relations between the League and the FA were underpinned by issues of power and control and driven by the inherent amateur-professional conflict. During the 1880s and 1890s they clashed on a series of matters, from the trivial to the fundamental. Sutcliffe's Jubilee History reveals that disagreements emerged within months of the League's creation, firstly over the FA's proposal to replace studs with bars on players' boots and then concerning the failure of some League clubs to affiliate to local associations before entering the FA Cup competition.³⁰ More seriously, however, in 1891 the governing body stepped in after the Management Committee had prohibited members from organising fixtures with non-League clubs found guilty of poaching League players. The FA saw this as an attempt by the League to extend its jurisdiction to outside clubs and forced a formal climb-down, though the blacklist apparently continued to operate surreptitiously.³¹ As we have seen, the League's own representative fixtures also became a major source of tension, particularly because they initially competed directly with the FA-organised internationals in the football calendar. As well as objecting to the date of the League

²⁹ Birley, *Land of Sport and Glory*, p. 36.

³⁰ Sutcliffe *et al.*, *Football League*, p. 4.

³¹ Sutcliffe *et al.*, *Football League*, p. 8; Green, *History of the FA*, p. 398. The League's blacklist also had dangerous implications for the FA Cup as it might preclude ties between League and non-League clubs.

fixture with its Scottish counterpart in 1900, the FA 'kicked against' the League's decision to advertise an Inter-League match as 'an International' at around the same time.³²

A perfect illustration of the contrasting League and FA conceptions of the professional side of football can be derived from the crisis precipitated by Queen Victoria's death in January 1901. On hearing of the monarch's passing, the FA Emergency Committee consisting of Clegg, Crump and Alcock, unilaterally postponed the following Saturday's FA Cup first round ties. This action was greeted with almost uniform criticism by the League Management Committee and club directors, firstly because it meant that two sets of gate-receipts would be lost as the Queen's funeral was to take place the subsequent Saturday, but, more significantly, because the decision had been taken without consulting the League. John Bentley, the League president, felt that a decision which affected thousands of spectators, hundreds of players and the finances of scores of professional clubs 'ought to have been left to... a more representative body than the Emergency Committee, who have little or no connection with club management and, consequently, hardly realise what it means'.³³ In a letter to *Athletic News*, Committeeman Charles Sutcliffe objected to the fact that the Football League 'consisting of 26 of the 32 clubs in the ties, were not consulted upon the most important and far-reaching resolution passed for many years'. While he was 'not jealous of the FA', Sutcliffe believed that the League (and indeed the Southern League) were 'sufficiently important... as to entitle them to some respect, consideration, and even deference'.³⁴ Bentley had indeed attempted to persuade the League clubs to oppose the FA's resolution but while only three out of 36 supported the action of the governing body, half were willing under the circumstances to acquiesce. There can be little doubt, however, that most would have agreed with the sentiments of 'Grasshopper' that the Emergency Committee had 'treated the whole matter from an entirely amateur point of view'.

The whole question shows more plainly than ever the necessity of a separate government being acquired for the professional branch of the

³² 'Harricus' (Harry Downs), 'The Football League, 1888-1901', *Athletic News*, 4 February 1901.

³³ *Athletic News*, 28 January 1901. Also see *Manchester Evening News*, 24, 26, 28 January 1901.

³⁴ Charles Sutcliffe letter to the editor, dated 1 February 1901, in *Athletic News*, 4 February 1901.

sport. The surroundings are so vastly different from the amateur section, who I repeat are supposed to play without any regard for the financial side of the question, that its requirements can only be properly dealt with by men who are perfectly conversant with them. If the present friction leads to the establishment of special Committees or Councils in the Football Association who shall have full control of the professional and amateur clubs respectively, it will not have been in vain. I shall be very sorry to find the professional clubs cut themselves adrift from the FA, but it does not require the mantle of Elijah to foretell that this will happen at no very distant day if the business considerations are ignored in the future, as they appear... to have been in the past.³⁵

In fact, while hard evidence is understandably difficult to come by, there is some indication that at this time the dissatisfaction of League clubs with their treatment at the hands of the FA was spilling over into serious consideration of mass secession. In League circles it was felt that a clique within the FA Council was intent on 'being antagonistic to the professional clubs' and the former Bolton secretary and journalist Harry Downs, for one, was in no doubt that the two bodies were 'slowly and gradually drifting apart' and that a split in the near future was likely.³⁶

Sutcliffe's retrospective account of his early years as a member of the Management Committee is particularly revealing of the mutual distrust between the League and the FA around the turn of the century. Sutcliffe remembered that a prominent FA Councillor had encouraged him to reform the League's executive body because 'The FA has no love for the Management Committee of The League. It is no credit to the game'. He went on to describe the League's attitude towards the FA:

...I found a bitter feeling not merely amongst members of the... Management Committee but among many clubs against the FA (sic.)... The League was face to face with a supercilious autocratic bearing on the part of some members of the Council of the FA that was obnoxious. The League was regarded as of no moment in football. As the mainstay of the system of professionalism in football it was looked upon as corrupt and degrading. The professional element of the FA was too easily outvoted and overridden by the amateur element. The vote and influence of minor county associations who knew nothing of the then requirements of

³⁵ 'Southern Notes' by 'Grasshopper' in *Athletic News*, 28 January 1901.

³⁶ *Manchester Evening News*, 2 February 1901; 'Harricus' (Harry Downs), 'The Football League, 1888-1901', *Athletic News*, 4 February 1901.

spectacular and popular football governed the game. These things rankled in the minds of the League clubs and the League Committeemen.³⁷

The over-riding conflict between the League and the FA in this period, however, centred on the financial arrangements between clubs and players, and more particularly the issues of transfers and wages. The retain-and-transfer system had certainly been a bone of contention from the early 1890s. In 1894 Clegg proposed a scheme to regulate some of the financial dealings between clubs and players, which included a clause effectively abolishing transfer payments.³⁸ Though this was never implemented, Clegg returned to the issue in February 1899 when he asked for the opinion of various leagues on 'the general question of the transfer of players' and called a conference to which representatives of the leagues and other interested parties (including the recently formed Players' Union) were invited.³⁹ Following the conference, Clegg issued a circular suggesting that the 'objectionable system' of buying and selling players should in future be prohibited. Not surprisingly, the League reacted strongly against what it considered to be 'a deliberate threat to end transfers' and instead proposed some minor modifications of its own.⁴⁰ Not to be put off, however, the FA Council set up a special emergency sub-committee which recommended in November that transfer payments should be discontinued and that the only monetary transaction between clubs should be for nominal expenses of £10 maximum. The single exception was to be in cases where fees had already been paid - these players could be sold on but no profit was to be made.⁴¹ Again the Management Committee signalled its resolute opposition to the FA's recommendations on the familiar grounds that they would allow the richer clubs to acquire the best talent without the necessity of compensating the club losing the players' services (see chapter 7). Yet the issue was really one of power and control: the League was anxious to ensure autonomy in what it considered to be its own affairs. The questions of transfers, wages, bonuses and all matters of finance should, it was argued, 'be the

³⁷ *Athletic News*, 24 February 1919.

³⁸ Green, *History of the FA*, pp. 404-05.

³⁹ Minutes of FA Consultative Committee, 1 February 1899; Harding, *Good of the Game*, p. 26.

⁴⁰ Sutcliffe *et al.*, *Football League*, p. 114.

⁴¹ FA Emergency Committee Report on 'Transfer of Players', 13 November 1899.

concern solely of the League'.⁴² As Bentley noted: 'The serious battle will be fought on what the League considers a principle and that is being allowed to work its own particular competition in its own particular way whilst at the same time observing the rules of the parent body'.⁴³ With the Scottish League's support, the League was able to resist the FA and prevent an agreement on the abolition of transfers, while subsequent FA reports and conferences during 1900 met with a similar fate.⁴⁴

At the same time, the FA took steps to regulate the payment of players. Although the League had attempted to impose its own wage limit in 1893, it was left to the FA, in 1900, to introduce a maximum wage of £4 per week (£208 per annum) and to ban the payment of bonuses for wins and draws. This decision was vehemently contested at the next FA annual meeting by the representatives of Aston Villa and Liverpool, who attempted to rescind the rule. Opponents of the wage rule again argued that it gave the amateurs of the FA unwarranted control over the private affairs of League clubs. Villa's Fred Rinder believed that 'the Association should not interfere with the internal finances of the clubs, but simply devote itself to making laws and seeing that... contracts entered into between clubs and players were loyally complied with'.⁴⁵ Yet not all League clubs opposed the maximum wage: Rinder's arguments in 1901, and at subsequent annual meetings, were rejected by influential members of the League, notably Bentley and Sutcliffe. In addition, representatives of Preston North End, Sheffield United, Newton Heath, Sunderland and Wolverhampton Wanderers, amongst others, all spoke out in favour of the rule.⁴⁶ On the other hand, many amateur as well as professional representatives on the FA Council remained dissatisfied with the maximum wage rule in principle and in practice. An investigation by the Rules Revision Committee in 1903-04 concluded that the rule should be modified rather than deleted entirely, with a sliding scale of wages based on

⁴² Sutcliffe *et al.*, *Football League*, p. 116.

⁴³ Quoted in Harding, *Good of the Game*, p. 27.

⁴⁴ Sutcliffe *et al.*, *Football League*, p. 116; FA 'Transfer of Players': Further Report, 15 April 1900; 'Transfer of Players': Further Report of the Representatives of the Association, 12 November 1900.

⁴⁵ Report of FA AGM in *Athletic News*, 27 May 1901.

⁴⁶ Reports of FA AGMs in *Athletic News*, 27 May 1901, 5 June 1905, 1 June 1908. John Bentley and former amateur international C. B. Fry both noted that it was Football League clubs who had effectively instituted the maximum wage, albeit through the machinery of the FA. *Sport Argus*, 4 March 1905. By 1909 Bentley had changed his mind and came out in support of the abolition of the maximum wage, a reversal which critics argued was due to his new position as a director of wealthy Manchester United. Report of FA AGM in *Athletic News*, 14 June 1909.

service and seniority, but this too was rejected by the Council and the League.⁴⁷ The two bodies therefore appeared to have reached a stalemate on both issues, with the Management Committee (notwithstanding its support for the wage rule in theory) keen to take full control of internal matters and the FA 'loath to surrender... what was probably looked upon as their prerogative of control'.⁴⁸

The accounts of both Sutcliffe and Green place considerable emphasis on the so-called breakthrough of 1904, when the FA finally agreed that the responsibility for financial dealings between clubs should rest with the League. Henceforth, the FA was to restrict itself to the role of arbiter between the club and player and to detect sharp practice by clubs. It is difficult, however, to identify any obvious shift in relations between the two bodies after 1904. The decision seems to have been informal and unminuted and whether it really represented a 'vital change' in FA policy, as Green has claimed, is a matter for conjecture.⁴⁹ Certainly, though it was now more cautious and conciliatory, the FA continued in its attempts to intervene in the operation of the transfer system and the remuneration of players. Those amateur representatives who were tiring of the governing body's association with the regular scandals and rumours of underhand dealing in League football led the way here. E. L. Holland made two unsuccessful proposals to the Council in 1904 aimed at amending what he regarded as the unsatisfactory 'regulations and conditions affecting the employment of professional players'.⁵⁰ The following year recommendations firstly by Alcock and G. S. Sherrington of the Suffolk FA to wipe the wage and bonus regulations from the rule book, and then by the Rules Revision Committee to revive the sliding wage scale concept, were both rejected. But the latter's idea for a £350 ceiling on transfer fees was passed, even though when the rule came into effect three years later it was easily evaded and lasted only three months.⁵¹

The FA made one final effort during the summer of 1908 to bring the League clubs into line when it offered an amnesty for previous breaches on the condition that they

⁴⁷ Mason, *Association Football*, p. 100; Green, *History of the FA*, p. 409.

⁴⁸ Sutcliffe, *et al.*, *Football League*, 116.

⁴⁹ Sutcliffe *et al.*, *Football League*, p. 116; Green, *History of the FA*, p. 409.

⁵⁰ Minutes of FA Council, 29 August, 7 November 1904.

⁵¹ Minutes of FA Council, 31 March 1905; Report of FA AGM in *Athletic News*, 1 June 1908.

observed the rules and reported suspected misdemeanours in the future. But the clubs were reluctant to take up the offer and continued to discuss possible bonus schemes and other plans to alter the FA's infamous Rule 31. In fact, it was not until the following February that the League clubs, prompted by Bentley, replied to the FA with a collective acceptance of the amnesty. At the same time, the League formally assured the FA that it knew nothing of alleged abuses of the transfer regulations but, if these could be substantiated, it would be prepared 'to assist the FA to remedy the evil in any well-considered way that may be suggested'.⁵² However, despite such public declarations of solidarity and co-operation, relations were now strained almost to breaking-point. There is, in fact, some evidence that a meeting of League clubs in September 1908 considered the possibility of seceding from the governing body if their proposals to allow player bonuses for wins and draws were not met. Fulham's then chairman Henry Norris similarly suggested that as many as 20 League members were prepared to break away from the FA if their attempts to remove wage restrictions proved unsuccessful at the 1909 annual meeting.⁵³ Indeed, by this stage the FA faced League hostility on at least two fronts: from the richer and more successful clubs who wanted to wipe away all laws relating to the financial nexus between employers and employees and those weaker members (and League officials like Sutcliffe) who considered the FA to be applying its rules half-heartedly and allowing offenders to break regulations almost at will.

The weight of these criticisms, buttressed by a particularly bitter annual meeting in 1909, finally persuaded the FA to formalise its 1904 decision by passing over the responsibility for club finances to the League in early 1910. The influence of Clegg was undoubtedly central to this decision. It is significant, for instance, that at the 1908 annual meeting it was the FA Council itself, with Clegg as its spokesman, which proposed the deletion of the maximum wage rule. The proposal failed but the following year the FA chairman tried again. Clegg's principal argument touched upon the previous assertions of Rinder and others that the FA was not the appropriate body to deal with issues of this kind.

⁵² Sutcliffe *et al.*, *Football League*, pp. 117-18; Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 19 August 1908, 9 January, 10 February 1909.

⁵³ Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 2, 9 September 1908; *Athletic News*, 22 February 1909.

The majority of clubs and players throughout the country were not personally concerned in those [wage and bonus] regulations. Why should members of the Council be troubled over them? Why should men who belonged to an amateur club, and only to an amateur club, be troubled to look after these matters and regulations... Those who were involved in those financial matters were surely the best persons to make the necessary arrangements for protecting their own interests... The Council wished to leave each section free to control money matters in accordance with their own desires.

Yet despite support from the wealthier League clubs, the FA was not allowed to withdraw quietly. Sutcliffe, in particular, clashed directly with Clegg and William Pickford over the issue of illegal payments and accused Clegg of stigmatising every Football League club with his allegations of irregularities.⁵⁴ The opposition of Sutcliffe and the pro-wage limit members was sufficient to bring about a narrow defeat of the FA's motion but by the end of the year definite steps had been taken to settle the question. On 10 January 1910, the FA issued a circular signalling its intention to delete all its rules relating to the financial arrangements between clubs and players, with the exception of the maximum wage, on the grounds that such concerns were 'incompatible with the position of The Football Association as the governing body of a national sport'.⁵⁵ This was finally achieved at an extraordinary general meeting in April. As commentators were quick to recognise, administrative power in the professional game had now shifted significantly from the FA to the League.⁵⁶

3. Changing Relations, 1910-39

As a turning-point in relations between the two bodies, 1910 was considerably more important than 1904. At the Football League's 'Coming of Age' Banquet in 1909, FA vice-president Charles Crump had differentiated between the FA as a magisterial body and the League as a body of entertainers: 'The duty of the Association was legislative and administrative, and the duty of the League was to provide attractive football for

⁵⁴ Report of FA AGM in *Athletic News*, 14 June 1909.

⁵⁵ FA Circular on Financial Arrangements Between Clubs and Players, 10 January 1910.

⁵⁶ Minutes of FA Extraordinary General Meeting, 22 April 1910.

the country.⁵⁷ Such a distinction could not be justified after 1910. The Management Committee's newly-defined authority over the financial dealings of its clubs heralded a burst of activity aimed at detecting breaches of rule. Sutcliffe admitted to the readers of his *Athletic News* column that the League had previously been dormant in this respect but promised that this would no longer be the case. Indeed within the period of a few weeks during 1911 there were separate reports of Sutcliffe and League secretary Tom Charnley visiting Glasgow and Cambuslang to investigate rumours of 'a well-known Lancashire club' paying excessive signing-on fees and of McKenna travelling to Teesside to follow up other allegations concerning illegal payments.⁵⁸ As the journalist Ivan Sharpe noted in his memoirs, prominent League representatives like Sutcliffe, McKenna and John Lewis spent much of their time playing Sherlock Holmes.⁵⁹

There still remained a certain amount of confusion over the respective duties of the League and the FA in relation to misconduct and breach of rules by clubs, officials and players. As many cases affected both League and FA rules the matter of jurisdiction was a complex one. Writing in January 1911, Sutcliffe attempted to clarify the situation by distinguishing between complaints against League clubs which pertained only to the League competition and rules and those which affected 'the game in general, its character and good name'. He suggested that the latter should be investigated either by the FA alone, or by a joint commission. This was not just because the FA had wider powers of inquiry but also because it could call upon a

more complete machinery for these investigations. The League has no Emergency Committee, and the Management Committee only meets monthly. The President has no special executive powers... The FA has long been the great judicial power in football, and its rules have been gradually built up to answer all the requirements suggested by long experience.⁶⁰

The common practice before this time had been for an FA commission to pass sentence and the League subsequently to consider any breaches of its own rules.

⁵⁷ Report of Football League 'Coming of Age' Banquet in *Athletic News*, 14 June 1909.

⁵⁸ *Athletic News*, 6 March, 29 May, 12 June 1911.

⁵⁹ Sharpe, *40 Years in Football*, p. 159.

⁶⁰ *Athletic News*, 30 January 1911.

There are some examples of joint FA-League commissions, such as that established to consider the reconstruction of the Newton Heath club in 1902, but these were comparatively rare and were always established on the initiative of the governing body so as to facilitate its investigation.⁶¹ However, in 1905, following Alf Common's sensational £1,000 transfer from Sunderland to Middlesbrough, the League Management Committee decided to instigate its own inquiry independently of the FA and, a year later, another League commission investigating irregular transfers to the Middlesbrough club effectively reversed the situation by uncovering and reporting a number of breaches of FA rules.⁶² It appears that even club officials were unsure where one body's jurisdiction ended and the other's began: Manchester City in 1906 and Sheffield United in 1911 were both censured by the League for reporting complaints over transfers to the FA secretary instead of the Management Committee.⁶³

A formal agreement was obviously necessary and this was reached in December 1911. Firstly, the distinction advocated by Sutcliffe months earlier was formalised by allowing the FA 'full authority' to inquire into suspected breaches of its rules relating to all affiliated clubs and registered players but giving the junior body power whenever possible to deal independently with 'Money claims between Clubs belonging to the Football League in League matters'. Secondly, the agreement established 'a general principle in the problem of joint discipline': henceforth any FA commission investigating a League club was to include members of the Management Committee who were also FA Councillors.⁶⁴ Indeed, from this point onwards, the concept of joint investigations and administrative co-operation became established practice over a range of issues. In 1912 the Management Committee accepted that joint FA-League commissions 'should have full power to act on behalf of the Football League'⁶⁵ and, over the next ten years or so, such commissions dealt with questions

⁶¹ Minutes of FA Council, 24 February 1902.

⁶² Inglis, *League Football*, p. 57; Report of Football League Commission into Middlesbrough FC in *Athletic News*, 4 June 1906.

⁶³ On the Manchester City case see *Athletic News*, 15, 22 October 1906. On the Sheffield United case, *Athletic News*, 18 September 1911; Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 26 April 1911.

⁶⁴ Agreement between The Football Association and The Football League, 4 December 1911, printed in Green, *History of the FA*, p. 401.

⁶⁵ Minutes of Football League, 2 December 1912.

involving the Players' Union, the illegal approaching of players, match-fixing and bribery and even the regulations affecting club shareholders.⁶⁶ When the League conducted an investigation into the alleged fixing of a match between Liverpool and Chelsea at the end of the 1912/13 season, it withheld its report until the FA's inquiry was completed so that consultation could take place and a joint report be agreed upon.⁶⁷ Even in cases where the League was not officially involved, the FA would forward its report to Preston and the Management Committee would decide whether to punish offenders on the basis of the FA's conclusions.⁶⁸ Thus, Green is right to suggest that after 1911 the League tended not to undertake independent full-scale inquiries, even if it continued to look into matters of a financial nature among its membership.⁶⁹ In this area, as perhaps in no other, relations between the two bodies were necessarily close.

The inter-war period also witnessed a considerable strengthening of the position of the Football League within the FA's own administrative structure. From the League's inception, many of its officials and committeemen were also FA Councillors, although they were elected through their local FAs or regional divisions rather than through any connection with the League. As it grew in size and significance, however, it was argued that the League should have a more permanent influence on the decision-making of the FA and, for this reason, League president John Bentley was nominated in 1902 as an FA vice-president. At the annual meeting Tom Sidney, the Staffordshire delegate and League vice-president, suggested that 'as the Football League, directly and indirectly, had really been the means of the Association occupying its present commanding position, the League should be honoured by their president becoming an officer of the Association'. Bentley lost the vote narrowly, mainly as a result of opposition from the amateur clubs and county associations: in fact, one reporter commented that the contest was not 'one of League v. Association,

⁶⁶ See Minutes of Football League, 4 November, 2 December 1912; Minutes of FA Emergency Committee, 1 January-31 March 1918; *Athletic News*, 7, 11 June, 26 July 1920.

⁶⁷ Minutes of Football League, 4, 18 April 1913.

⁶⁸ See, for instance, the report on financial dealings at Arsenal after which Sir Henry Norris was suspended from future involvement in club management by the FA Commission. Minutes of Football League, 13 September, 17 October 1927.

⁶⁹ Green, *History of the FA*, p. 401.

but rather of professionalism v. amateurism'.⁷⁰ Nevertheless, three years later the articles of association were changed specifically so as to allow his admittance as an additional vice-president.⁷¹ Appendix 8 shows that the influence of League Committeemen on the standing committees of the FA also increased steadily. This is reflected not so much in the actual number of places allocated but the fact that by the 1920s the League had at least one member on most of the important committees. As an officer of the FA, the League president was in a particularly good position to influence policy and decision-making. For instance, for the 1919/20 season, McKenna was appointed to the Consultative, Finance, International Selection, Leagues Sanction and Appeals Committees and additionally took the vacant place on the International Football Association Board, which was responsible for co-ordinating the actions of each FA in the United Kingdom as well as proposing changes in the laws of the game.⁷² By the mid-1920s, McKenna had also become a member of perhaps the most exclusive and powerful FA sub-group - the Emergency Committee - which controlled the Association's business, in conjunction with the secretary, in-between meetings of the Council.

Yet what the League really wanted was direct representation on the Council similar to that enjoyed by distinct interest groups like the army, the public schools and Oxford and Cambridge Universities. While it be could claimed that those Management Committee members on the legislative body of the FA were League representatives first and foremost, technically they remained attached to their particular club or association. Even as a vice-president McKenna, for instance, was linked officially with Liverpool FC, while Sutcliffe and Lewis nominally represented Rawtenstall and the Lancashire FA respectively. But it was not until April 1929 that the Management Committee resolved to tackle the issue. It issued a circular to its clubs with the intention of eliciting opinions on the degree of representation it should agitate for and organised a conference with the FA Council to discuss the whole question.⁷³ The request was supported by the now familiar argument that 'the income of the Football

⁷⁰ Report of FA AGM in *Athletic News*, 2 June 1902.

⁷¹ Report of FA AGM in *Athletic News*, 5 June 1905.

⁷² Minutes of Meeting of the FA Officers, 14 April 1919; Minutes of FA Emergency Committee, 1-26 May 1919.

⁷³ Minutes of Football League, 12 April 1929.

Association depended largely upon the Cup-ties in which the League clubs took part' and that 'the League contributed all the players in the International matches not only for England, but practically all for Wales and many for Scotland and Ireland'⁷⁴ (see chapter 8). As it happened, the FA took little persuading, allowing the League four seats on the Council by right and a free choice of its own representatives. A year later League representation was increased to eight, which meant that the entire Management Committee automatically became members of the Council.⁷⁵ Although there is some dispute over its precise implications, this was unquestionably a significant step for the Football League. A later League secretary, Alan Hardaker, has argued that the move was a clever ploy by the FA to divide the loyalties of Committeemen, but Simon Inglis is surely more convincing in his view that this rule change 'made the League the single most powerful group within the FA' and tied the administration of the two bodies closer together than ever before.⁷⁶ Certainly, most of the evidence points to the enhancing rather than the diminishing of League power as a result of its new status and the data from Appendix 8 seems to indicate that the policy process and internal functioning of the FA was increasingly subject, in one way or another, to League input during the 1930s.

If relations between the League and the FA were closer from 1910 than they had been before, they were not necessarily more cordial. Administrative settlements could do little to disturb the deep-seated resentment and antagonism which was undoubtedly prevalent on both sides. Much of this was fuelled by a distinct absence of diplomacy, particularly on the part of the FA. For example, the governing body's failure to provide the League with an official invitation to its Jubilee Banquet in 1913 was regarded as a snub by the Management Committee, who subsequently refused to attend in their individual capacities.⁷⁷ According to Sutcliffe, League representatives were for many years also denied complimentary pavilion tickets for FA Cup Finals and international fixtures, a situation which generated considerable bad feeling.

⁷⁴ Sutcliffe, *et al.*, *Football League*, p. 33.

⁷⁵ Minutes of Football League, 10 May 1929; *Athletic News*, 7 June 1930.

⁷⁶ Hardaker, *Hardaker of the League*, pp. 130-31; Inglis, *League Football*, p. 134; Dabscheck, 'Defensive Manchester', p. 229. Hardaker's account is inaccurate as well as idiosyncratic, as he claims that Stanley Rous initiated the whole incident. Rous, in fact, did not become FA secretary until 1934.

⁷⁷ Minutes of Football League, 1 October 1913.

Perhaps the invitation to the members of the FA International Selection to attend the Inter-League fixture between the English and the Scots in 1920 was a subtle attempt by the League to remind the FA of its previous discourtesy.⁷⁸ More significantly, there is some indication that the relationship between the two bodies suffered from the personal animosity between certain officials. Hardaker's autobiography reveals that there was 'no love lost' between secretaries Fred Howarth and Stanley Rous, partly due to the fact that Howarth had applied, but lost out to Rous, for the FA position after Frederick Wall's retirement in 1934. 'The two men, unlike in every way, were always very polite to each other, but they simply did not get on together. Their relationship, behind all the civil words, was a poor thing'.⁷⁹

The experience of the First World War, in which the FA had effectively closed down while the League struggled on with its regional competitions, clearly soured relations between the two. In early 1919, one club official was reported to have remarked:

The Football Association had better take care. What has the FA done for us during the war? A lot of clubs are ready to break away at a moment's notice. The League can do very well without the FA, but the latter would be badly off without the League clubs.⁸⁰

Sentiments of this kind were compounded in February 1919 when these bodies clashed again over the question of the League's representative matches. The disagreement stemmed from a meeting in late 1918 at which the FA had declined to arrange international fixtures for the season but gave its consent to the proposed Inter-League matches.⁸¹ But when the League forwarded its formal application to the FA secretary, it was told that only provisional consent could be given for its match with the Scottish League as the FA was now organising international matches which would take precedence on the fixture calendar. In response to this development, Sutcliffe wrote an extended article in *Athletic News* outlining the history of League-FA conflicts while accusing the governing body of reopening old sores and needlessly

⁷⁸ Sutcliffe also recalled how he had often been forced to wait outside the Crystal Palace ground on Cup Final day while the FA secretary tried to find him a seat. 'Time after time I have paid for a ticket rather than beg for a seat.' *Athletic News*, 24 February 1919; Minutes of FA International Selection Committee, 29 March 1920.

⁷⁹ Hardaker, *Hardaker of the League*, p. 128.

⁸⁰ *Athletic News*, 24 February 1919.

⁸¹ Minutes of FA Emergency Committee, 30 September-31 December 1918.

belittling the League. To his mind, the League should have been treated as an equal rather than a subordinate: 'It makes The League wonder where their rights end and favour steps in. Today it is necessary for every member of the FA to recognise the power and value of The Football League.'⁸² A glance at the minutes of the League in the 1920s indicates, however, that the FA's sanction over the dates of Inter-League matches was still used on occasions when these affected its own international fixture schedule. In such instances, the League generally bowed to the FA's wishes in order to avoid conflict.⁸³ This type of conciliatory stance was also evident when the Management Committee convinced a group of member clubs to withdraw a proposal to modify the rule relating to the release of players for international fixtures 'as a gesture of friendliness to the FA'.⁸⁴

If it was still dictated to over Inter-League matches, the League was increasingly influential by the inter-war period in some of the established areas of FA authority, especially where changes in the laws of the game were concerned. We shall see later the precise role played here both by the League as a collective and by individual officials, but for now it is sufficient to recognise that the League was often the driving-force behind these developments. The best illustration of this was the modification of the offside rule in 1925. The Management Committee experimented with the proposed law of two instead of three defenders in a number of trial and benefit matches at the start of the year. Subsequently, it was Fred Rinder and Sutcliffe - two members of the Committee - who were most prominent in successfully advocating acceptance of the new rule at the FA annual meeting in June⁸⁵ (see chapter 9). It is indeed noteworthy that League clubs, as well as the executive, were more prepared to pass resolutions pertaining to changes in the laws of the game by the 1930s.⁸⁶ The notion that these matters were outside the League's sphere of influence had been dismissed by this point.

⁸² *Athletic News*, 24 February 1919.

⁸³ See Minutes of Football League, 11 August 1927.

⁸⁴ Minutes of Football League, 2 June 1930 (AGM).

⁸⁵ Minutes of Football League, 12 January, 3 April 1925; Report of FA AGM in *Athletic News*, 15 June 1925.

⁸⁶ For instance, see Report of Meeting of Football League Clubs, First and Second Divisions, 4 April 1930.

4. Conclusion

This chapter has examined the major developments which the League-FA relationship underwent before 1940. The lines of authority between the two bodies were not prescribed in any constitutional document but were subject to constant change and re-evaluation, particularly after the League's assumption of financial control over its members in 1910. Significantly, however, the FA leadership continued throughout this period to be purveyors of an amateur conception of football and to see the professional elite, embodied in the League, as an ideological burden (if also a financial necessity). The amateur domination of the FA is indeed evident from the fact that of 57 Council members in 1909, over 40 had no connection with the professional side of the game.⁸⁷ Moreover, personally and ideologically there remained a vast gulf between the League and the FA. Men like Sutcliffe had little acquaintance with, or affinity towards, the southern (and indeed the northern) amateurs on the FA Council. As Ivan Sharpe noted, Sutcliffe contrasted in 'type and mannerism' from FA leaders like Clegg and Wall, and the same could have been said of many of the League's Committee members and club directors.⁸⁸

In many ways, in spite of the increased power and influence which the League could wield, the FA continued to look upon the professional body as a junior partner, offering it neither respect nor parity. In this respect, the family metaphor was a particularly apt and well-trodden one. At the League's 'Coming of Age' Banquet in 1909, Clegg had remarked that 'tomorrow, so far as the League is concerned, there will be a man in the house... May I express the hope now that, having become a man, you will put away childish things'.⁸⁹ Yet in the eyes of Clegg and the FA, the Football League remained a mischievous boy.

⁸⁷ Report of a speech by Clegg at a meeting of the Sheffield and Hallamshire FA, 27 July 1909, quoted in Green, *History of the FA*, pp. 412-14.

⁸⁸ Sharpe, *40 Years in Football*, p. 157.

⁸⁹ Report of Football League 'Coming-of-Age' Banquet in *Athletic News*, 14 June 1909.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE LEAGUE AND ITS MEMBER CLUBS

Writing in 1926, the journalist and former *Athletic News* editor James Catton described the relationship between the Football League executive - the Management Committee - and the clubs in the following terms:

The Committee lead. The clubs look to these men for guidance and they get it. They consider the problems of the game and generally they give a considered opinion. But if the subject is so full of thorns and prickles, and they are not unanimous, they leave the matter to the clubs. They generally agree to take no action in such circumstances and the prevailing state of affairs remains, as in the case of all attempts to limit the question of transfer fees. If the Management Committee cannot see a way out, the clubs give it up. It is the perfect relationship - of trust on one side and of no abuse of power on the other. This is the system that has made the League so harmonious and so co-operative.¹

While this undoubtedly represents a glorified and unproblematic picture of relations, it nevertheless clearly illustrates the extent to which the Management Committee had by the 1920s successfully developed a powerful interventionist role in the management of its member clubs. In its first decade the Committee had struggled to establish a central position in the decision-making process, with clubs resisting central control and continuing to assert their independence of general League rulings and Committee decisions. Writing in 1938, Sutcliffe argued that the attitude of clubs in this initial period was characterised by recalcitrance and disloyalty to the League: 'Rules were broken almost with impunity, and when the offenders were taken to task they took steps that go to show how slack was the sense of discipline, steps that would be not merely unconstitutional today but would create a feeling of astonishment at their audacity'.² Most clubs regarded themselves as autonomous organisations tied loosely to the Football League structure rather than League clubs first and foremost. Arguably the onset of war in 1914 and the development of mutual support schemes to ensure the economic survival of all member clubs in the absence of a comprehensive league competition was fundamental in inculcating clubs with a sense of commitment to the

¹ *All Sports Weekly*, 11 September 1926.

² Sutcliffe *et al.*, *Football League*, 1938.

League itself. And during the inter-war period the scope of the League executive's powers were extended further as it developed tighter regulatory control over its constituent clubs. As Political and Economic Planning's (PEP) 1951 report noted:

It regulates its member clubs in such matters as wages, bonuses, transfers and percentages of gates to be paid to visiting clubs, lays down conditions under which matches take place, and determines many other club activities. This is a wide authority, covering many points of procedure from international transfers... and disciplinary action against players and clubs, down to the colour of linesmen's flags.³

Indeed, unlike the FA, by the Second World War the Football League was no longer a suzerain but was increasingly perceived by the press, and sometimes even by member clubs, as almost an autocratic ruler.

These changes in the relationship between the executive and the clubs reveal a more fundamental shift in the function and purpose of the Football League. In the 1890s and the first few years of the twentieth century the League could be understood as little more than a kind of rudimentary voluntary association, with 'a set of rules, a declared purpose and a membership defined by some formal act of joining'.⁴ Basically, the League had little meaning as an body independent of the clubs forming its membership: it was a competition organiser and an arbiter in the event of possible disputes but did not in any sense determine the decision-making of the clubs. Gradually, however, the Management Committee came to wield centralised control over its membership in all issues affecting the running of the competition - from players to referees and grounds to ticket prices - in an effort to ensure the maintenance of its primary ethos: the notion that the League should be, as far as possible, a fair competition between equals. In this sense the Committee developed into more than just a regulatory power: by 1939 it was initiating policy and setting the parameters for decisions made in every boardroom in the League.

³ 'The Football Industry - I', p. 163.

⁴ Morris, 'Clubs, societies and associations', p. 395.

1. The Constitutional Division of Power

The constitutional division of power between the clubs and the Committee remained basically unchanged from 1888 until the Second World War. According to the League's first set of rules each member club was entitled to appoint a representative to the General Committee, which normally met annually but could be convened on the wishes of the Management Committee or by requisition of at least half of the clubs. At annual meetings the club representatives elected the League officials - the chairman, treasurer and secretary - as well as the Management Committee and only at these general meetings of clubs could League rules be changed. The prescribed role of the Management Committee was, in contrast, not to make rules but administer them: it appointed match officials, regulated transfers between clubs and conducted the general business of the League through periodic (normally monthly) meetings. In addition to these executive powers the Committee acted as the League's judiciary; settling any disputes arising between, or complaints from, clubs or players and with the discretionary power 'to deal with any offending club or clubs, player or players, as they may think fit, and to deal with any matter not provided for in [the League] rules'.⁵ During the first few seasons, however, the clubs were reluctant to relinquish collective control over disciplinary issues to a central authority such as the Management Committee. General assemblies of club representatives were called to discuss matters ranging from the conduct of players on the field to the abandonment of fog-affected matches and, in certain cases, clubs were even successful in overturning Committee rulings.⁶ One writer has noted that until the late 1890s

The League's disciplinary powers remained... feeble... The Management Committee was being constantly reproached for being timorous in its dealing with clubs, but the plain fact was that it did not feel strong enough to deal drastically with the delinquents.⁷

⁵ Football League Handbook, 1890/91. For the League's original rules see Sutcliffe *et al.*, *Football League*, pp. 4-5.

⁶ Sutcliffe *et al.*, *Football League*, pp. 4, 6.

⁷ King, *Popular History of Association Football*, p. 30.

The key problem was that, though the Committee could issue fines and other disciplinary measures, the scope of its judicial authority remained unclear and ultimately subject to club sanction. Only in 1910 were the Committee's powers of inquiry clarified and extended further. Henceforth it was empowered to look into 'all financial arrangements between clubs and players' and, by 1913, this included any breaches of League rules by clubs, players and officials. Moreover, the Committee was now able to compel witnesses to attend special commission hearings and to order the production of related documents. Additionally it was entitled to publish all proceedings and findings 'whether the same shall or shall not reflect on the character or conduct of any Club, official, player or spectator'.⁸

If League clubs were increasingly prepared by the beginning of the twentieth century to accept the Management Committee's independent judicial authority, they were less ready to relinquish legislative and even administrative control. In 1902 the clubs resisted the Committee's wishes that it should be free to appoint the successor to departing secretary Harry Lockett and instead carried out its own elections for the post, while collectively deciding on the salary to be paid.⁹ The appointment of referees and linesmen was another area in which the executive and the clubs briefly battled for supremacy. From the start clubs were able to nominate officials but it was the Committee's task to choose the final lists. This system generated considerable criticism, particularly in December 1904 when the Stoke programme editor suggested that some referees were chosen 'not through merit but through favouritism, and because they are particular nominees of some member of the Committee'.¹⁰ Consequently, the following summer Aston Villa successfully introduced a revised scheme allowing the Committee to appoint only six referees to the list with the clubs nominating and electing the remaining 30 or so. With the reduction of the size of the referees list two years later the Committee's influence was limited to completing the lists if insufficient officials had been elected and also appointing an emergency list of ten referees. Yet by 1912 widespread dissatisfaction with the system amongst clubs - who were often pestered by officials touting for votes - led them to revert to selection

⁸ Football League Handbook, 1910/11, Rule 12; Report of Football League AGM in *Athletic News*, 2 June 1913.

⁹ Report of Football League AGM in *Athletic News*, 2 June 1902.

¹⁰ Quoted in Inglis, *League Football*, p. 77.

by Committee and to restrict themselves to nominating three (later reduced to two and then just one) linesmen.¹¹ It should also be noted that throughout the period it was the Committee who controlled the match-by-match appointment of officials. Clubs were entitled to make formal complaints against officials, and were even obliged by the Committee to award referees 'points' based on assessments of their performance in each match, but it remained difficult for individual clubs to prevent referees they disliked from officiating. When Aston Villa objected to the appointment of Sutcliffe himself for a League match during 1902/03 (the one season in the period in which he had not been elected to the Committee) on the grounds that 'he has never previously given satisfaction', the Committee declined to replace him despite informally agreeing that he was 'physically incapable' of doing the job. An appeal by Sheffield United to ban the renowned J. T. Howcroft of Bolton from referring any of the club's League engagements was similarly dismissed by the Management Committee.¹²

Clubs were even less prepared to surrender the legislative initiative to the Management Committee, at least during the early 1900s. Although there was no specific regulation preventing the Committee, along with clubs, from proposing reforms and rule changes, there is some evidence that clubs resented executive intervention in this area. Committee member John Lewis complained that at the 1902 annual meeting the vast majority of Committee proposals had been vetoed by the club electorate and in 1904 *Athletic News* could report that

The attitude of the clubs generally towards the management committee has been to mind their own business. The clubs think they should make the rules and the committee administer them... the clubs would not be told what to do by the committee.¹³

Yet towards the end of the decade clubs began to delegate certain responsibilities, particularly regarding matters of major constitutional change such as the creation of a third division. On a number of occasions between 1907 and 1911 the Management

¹¹ Reports of Football League AGMs in *Athletic News*, 5 June 1905; 3 June 1907; Minutes of Football League, 3 June 1912 (AGM).

¹² Minutes of Aston Villa FC, 30 October, 6, 20 November 1902; Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 20 December 1905.

¹³ Reports of Football League AGMs in *Athletic News*, 2 June 1902; 6 June 1904.

Committee was 'instructed' by a resolution of clubs to consider the advisability of expanding the League and then to report back, leaving the final decision in the hands of the members.¹⁴ This and other instances represented a significant shift in the Committee's role from a reactive judicial body to a more proactive legislative one, increasingly perceived by clubs as having both the time and expertise to develop major policy initiatives. Certainly, from this point the majority of successful schemes and reforms at annual meetings began to emanate from the Management Committee rather than the clubs and it became rare for a Committee proposal to be vetoed. In fact, it was increasingly difficult for a club representative to secure support for a proposed reform without some form of collaboration with, or approval from, the executive. Hence after Arsenal's independent proposals to limit transfer fees failed in 1922 and 1923, the Management Committee was formally requested by the Arsenal representative 'to take the matter into earnest consideration and report to the next annual meeting the result of their deliberations'. While agreeing with the proposal in principle, the Committee, after consultation with all member clubs, had to report that 'there is no need to interfere with the present rule... [and] no such desire for limitation as would justify them in formulating any scheme'.¹⁵ However, it must be recognised that the Committee did not merely act as a filter for the proposals of its members but increasingly took the initiative in developing new schemes and altering existing rules. While this had long been accepted in practice by member clubs, it was only given constitutional legitimacy during the mid-1930s with the introduction of a clause giving the Committee 'power in their discretion to submit any alteration of Rule thought desirable'.¹⁶

2. Financing the League

The first decade of the twentieth century was also a crucial period in the debate over the financial obligations of member clubs towards the League. Clubs had been reluctant from the start to make anything more than minor contributions to the League's general administrative funds, and even by 1900 annual subscriptions were just £10 10s. for first division members and half that amount in the lower division.

¹⁴ See, for example, Reports of Football League AGMs in *Athletic News*, 1 June 1908; 5 June 1911; Football League Circular to Clubs, 30 April 1909.

¹⁵ Minutes of Football League, 28 May (AGM); 17 December 1923.

¹⁶ Football League Handbook, 1937/38, Rule 80.

Additionally, re-elected clubs and those joining the League paid an entrance fee of £5 5s., as did clubs promoted from the second division to the first. Subscriptions and entrance fees were thus a relatively minor source of income for the League. During the 1900/01 season just over £300 was raised in this way, representing approximately 28 per cent of the total League income as compared with £743 (67 per cent) from that seasons' two Inter-League matches; these percentages had changed little by 1905/06 with just over 23 per cent from subscriptions and entrance fees, nearly 9 per cent from fines and 66 per cent coming from the representative fixtures.¹⁷

The precarious nature of the League's finances, which relied so much on unfixed and insecure sources of income such as representative match receipts and, to a lesser extent, club fines, began increasingly to alarm members of the Management Committee. League rules did entitle the Committee to organise special fund-raising matches or make additional levies on members, as they did at the beginning of the 1901/02 season, to cover any substantial deficit but this did not affect the general belief that the funding of the League was, in president Bentley's words, 'unbusinesslike and unsound', a situation further exacerbated by the fact that on a number of occasions in the early 1900s Committee members were required, as club directors often were, to sign guarantees for bank overdrafts.¹⁸ This unsatisfactory state of affairs led the Committee to suggest in 1901, and then again at the next two annual meetings, the introduction of a half per cent 'tax' on all League gates - a proposal which was vigorously opposed by the majority of clubs on each occasion. Advocates of 'taxation' insisted that it was a club's duty to contribute to the working expenses of the League. *Athletic News*, for one, noted that 'The League has made the clubs into wealthy organisations, and the clubs should see that the League does not suffer financial embarrassment'.¹⁹ For critics like Liverpool's future League president John McKenna, however, the scheme placed an unfair financial burden on first division clubs, who would be responsible for well over two-thirds of the overall cost of running the League. Yet in reality it was not the amount of 'taxation' so much as the principle to which many clubs objected. Revenue, especially gate money, seems

¹⁷ Inglis, *League Football*, pp. 48-50; *Athletic News*, 28 May 1906.

¹⁸ *Athletic News*, 13 May 1901; Sutcliffe *et al.*, *Football League*, p. 65..

¹⁹ *Athletic News*, 18 May 1903.

to have been regarded by clubs as the product of their individual endeavour, even though visiting teams provided the necessary competition and the League itself gave the fixture context and meaning. Thus few representatives were yet prepared to voluntarily hand over 'their' hard-earned money to cover the administrative costs of the executive body.²⁰

While League members continued to reject a 'tax' on gates, the Committee searched for an alternative means of increasing revenue. The solution came in 1908 with the decision to alter the entrance fee for clubs joining the League from a mere five guineas to £300, out of which up to £200 could be granted to the club losing its membership. The feeling within the Committee was that

the income of the League was not consistent with its dignity and its position... its finances ought to be in a sure and satisfactory state. The derivation of an income from Inter-League matches was a fickle source, and sometimes it proved false. The League ought to have a settled income... and it was for that reason that... the entrance fee should be made considerable larger.²¹

The steady financial improvement which resulted partly from this change temporarily silenced the calls for a more comprehensive form of club funding. Indeed, the League recorded its largest profit ever in 1912/13, making £1,567 on the season with over half of this derived indirectly from club fines, and was able for the first time to enter into an external business investment by engaging £1,000 in the Sheffield Gas Light Company.²²

But it was to be the onset of war and the obvious difficulties this generated for League finances which became crucial factors in the eventual introduction of the 'taxation' principle. During both the initial 1914/15 season, when the Football League programme had continued in the face of widespread public criticism²³, and the second wartime season of largely regional competition, the Committee had still been able to

²⁰ Reports of Football League AGMs in *Athletic News*, 20 May 1901; 1 June 1903.

²¹ Report of Football League AGM in *Athletic News*, 1 June 1908.

²² Minutes of Football League, 26 May 1913 (AGM).

²³ See Colin Veitch, 'Play Up! Play Up! and Win the War!: Football, the Nation and the First World War 1914-15', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 20, 1985, pp. 363-78.

call on some established sources of revenue. Subscriptions still provided over £300 in 1915/16 and a similar amount had been donated by the Inter-League Board to partially cover the revenue previously drawn from the Inter-League matches which ceased at the start of that season. It was anticipated that these sources, however, were to end or be seriously reduced the following season and thus the Management Committee was faced with trying to find alternative funding to cover annual expenses estimated at £880 plus.²⁴ Ironically on McKenna's suggestion, then, the Committee introduced at the 1916 annual meeting a one per cent 'tax' on the net gate and stand receipts of member clubs in order to pay for management expenses. According to one Committee spokesman, the financial contribution of clubs was essential to save the League from bankruptcy and was justified because the executive

had never hitherto placed upon the clubs a tax beyond the usual annual subscription and an occasional levy. They had generally managed to pay their way through the kind-heartedness of clubs which (sic.) seemed to view misdeeds from another standpoint than the Management Committee, and by means of fines and other little 'offsides' the League had managed to live. [He] never felt it was a very creditable way.²⁵

The scheme seems to have received significant support, particularly from *Athletic News* and club directors such as Bradford's T. E. Maley, who both advocated the continuance of 'taxation' after the war. It was also a financial success, yielding over £101 in its first full month of operation and even securing support from the League's former London members, who despite competing under the aegis of the London Combination during the war still agreed voluntarily to forward their contributions to the Committee.²⁶ By the end of the 1918/19 season the League's finances had recovered sufficiently to show a balance of £2,136 achieved with the aid of £1,200 from the gate 'tax'.

The system continued immediately after the war, with each member club now contributing a half rather than one per cent, and remained for 1920/21 with the proviso that contributions could be suspended during the season by the Management

²⁴ *Athletic News*, 29 May 1916.

²⁵ Report of Football League AGM in *Athletic News*, 24 July 1916.

²⁶ *Athletic News*, 10, 24 July, 9, 16 October 1916.

Committee if sufficient funds became available. In fact the League's finances were stable enough to allow the Committee to discontinue 'taxation' midway through both the 1921/22 and 1922/23 seasons, although it is notable that clubs were still required to send the League secretary details of their match takings and payments.²⁷ Moreover, the income derived from the gate receipts of first and second division clubs was evidently considered substantial enough on its own to spare the newly incorporated third division associate members any similar financial contribution. This changed, however, in 1924 when the Committee introduced a new percentage scheme covering both the League's working expenses and the insurance of players. Henceforth first and second division clubs were to contribute one per cent of their net and stand receipts from League matches while those in the third division southern and northern sections gave 1½ and two per cent respectively (see chapter 6). No additional subscriptions or levies were demanded and the following year the scheme was extended to include a similar 'tax' on cup-tie gate receipts. From this income the Committee proposed to direct a little under half - an estimated £5,000 per annum - to run and administer the League.²⁸ However, by the late 1920s the financial liabilities of the insurance scheme had clearly eclipsed those of the League itself and while over £11,000 was directed annually to cover compensation claims, £2,500-4,000 was considered sufficient to account for the League's modest expenditure. Nevertheless, during the inter-war period club funding via gate 'taxation' represented the primary source of revenue, accounting for somewhere between 65 and 80 per cent of annual income as compared with 10-20 per cent from the Inter-League fixtures.²⁹

3. Executive Control, Regulation and the Question of Club Autonomy

The creation of the Football League naturally represented a crucial step towards the weakening of club autonomy, irrespective of the clear financial and organisational benefits it brought. Henceforth, as League members, clubs had less freedom to choose whom they played, where and when, and under what circumstances. The club

²⁷ Minutes of Football League, 31 May 1920 (AGM); 5 December 1921, 18 December 1922.

²⁸ Minutes of Football League, 2 June 1924 (AGM); 10, 12 March 1924 (SGM of Third Division Southern and Northern Sections); Report of Football League AGM in *Athletic News*, 9 June 1924.

²⁹ See Annual Financial Statements of Football League and Football League Mutual Insurance Federation (FLMIF).

secretary's role of arranging the season's fixtures was superseded by the process of annual fixture meetings and any subsequent disputes which arose were settled by the League secretary and ultimately the Management Committee. Friendly matches were still occasionally arranged when a club had no prior League or cup commitments but this became increasingly less common with the gradual enlargement of the divisions to 16, 18, 20 and then 22 members by the end of the First World War. Moreover, from the early 1890s complex regulations were developed which precluded member clubs from arranging friendly fixtures (often with non-League clubs) which might affect the gates of fellow members.³⁰ While these regulations were subsequently simplified, the principle underlying them remained and the Management Committee occasionally prohibited the playing of such matches. Hence Plymouth Argyle was ordered to cancel a visit to the amateur Corinthians club on the same afternoon as a scheduled League fixture between Crystal Palace and Barnsley. It was believed that the close proximity of the two grounds and the substantial support still enjoyed by the Corinthians 'would materially affect the gate' at Palace.³¹ After 1927 the rules were changed to explicitly prohibit any club 'improperly interfering' with another clubs' home fixtures: Bristol Rovers' request to host a lucrative Good Friday match against Dutch opponents was rejected for this reason.³² Kick-off times were also brought closer into the executive's sphere of influence when it was agreed in 1921 that Saturday matches should begin no later than 3-15 p.m. Previously kick-off times had ranged from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. and some clubs had given themselves greater flexibility by not even advertising a scheduled time of kick-off (see chapter 9). From the following year clubs could apply to begin matches later than the standard 3-15 but this was to be decided in advance and at the discretion of the Committee.³³

In other areas the transfer of power and responsibility from club to League was a much more gradual and complicated process. The control of players is a case in point. Although players were recruited, contracted and paid directly by their clubs, they were

³⁰ For example, see Football League Handbook, 1893/94, Rule 15.

³¹ Minutes of Football League, 17 November 1922. For a detailed exploration of the incident, and particularly the response of *The Times* and other supporters of amateur football, see Simon Inglis, *Soccer in the Dock. A History of British Football Scandals, 1900 to 1965*, London, 1985, chapter 4.

³² Inglis, *Soccer in the Dock*, p. 61; Minutes of Football League, 16 February 1931.

³³ Minutes of Football League, 20 December 1920; 11 May, 30 May 1921 (AGM); 29 May 1922 (AGM).

also required to register with the League (and the FA) before they could play in League competitions. The sanction of the executive was required for the movement of players between member clubs and the introduction of retain and transfer lists during the early 1890s allowed the Management Committee increased power to regulate the transfer market centrally. By about 1897 the League had also taken on the role of arbiter between clubs who were unable to agree on the price for a transferred player and later began to alter those fees which (on the players' request) were considered unreasonably high.³⁴ Moreover, it was actually the League and not the club who owned players' registrations. When a club left the League the registration of its players automatically became the possession of the Committee, which was then entitled to fix transfer fees and negotiate the sale of players on the club's behalf. The most salient example of this was the so-called 'auction' of Leeds City's entire playing staff following the clubs' expulsion from the League in October 1919. The Committee organised for the representatives of any interested members - 30 attended - to meet at a hotel in Leeds where each player was sold to the highest bidder along with club equipment such as nets, goal-posts, boots and kit.³⁵ In these circumstances, the money received legally belonged to the League although the Committee normally paid a discretionary sum to the exiting club and sometimes to the transferred player as his accrued share of presumed benefit.

We have seen that over the opening two decades of the century the League developed a series of rules and guidelines to regulate the financial arrangements between clubs and their employees. This was begun, of course, not directly by the League but through the machinery of the FA with the introduction of the maximum wage law and the outlawing of bonuses in 1901. In 1904 the FA unofficially passed over to the League all responsibility for financial dealings between its clubs and players and by 1910 the governing body had formally scrapped all such rules except the maximum wage and given the League jurisdiction to 'alter their Rules to include provisions for the engagement of Players in accordance with the wishes of their members'.³⁶ In March of that year the Committee introduced its first comprehensive scheme to

³⁴ Vamplew, *Pay Up*, p. 128.

³⁵ Martin Jarred and Malcolm MacDonald, *Leeds United: A Complete Record, 1919-1989*, Derby, 1989, p. 347-48; *Athletic News*, 20 October 1919.

³⁶ FA Circular on Financial Arrangements Between Clubs and Players, 10 January 1910.

regulate the payment of wages, re-signing bonuses, talent money, benefits and accrued benefits for transferred players.³⁷ By 1920 stipulated match bonuses for League and cup-ties were also established and a ceiling was placed on benefit payments for both first and second team players. At the same time the introduction of a sliding scale allowed closer central control over wage levels, with fixed maximums for new players and annual rises over four years to an overall maximum. Additional earnings such as tour allowances and even removal expenses and wedding presents were also subject to Committee approval and in all cases official sanction had to be obtained before any wage rise or benefit payment could be granted by the club. This is not to say, of course, that boards of directors were prevented from establishing individual club wage structures and other earnings policies within the limits prescribed by League rules; the clear gap in basic wages between clubs in the top and lower divisions and the difference in approach towards benefits and other discretionary payments (see chapter 5) shows this. There was certainly nothing approaching uniformity in players' earnings across the League. Yet compared with the situation at the beginning of the century, clubs in the inter-war period were less free to reward their players as they chose and the League executive had effectively replaced the board of directors as the chief regulator of employee earnings.

While there was clearly some feeling that the 'domestic' affairs of member clubs should remain outside the influence of the Management Committee, in reality the dividing line between matters of club and League concern became increasingly blurred and open to interpretation. The Committee was generally reluctant to become directly involved in the internal management of clubs, though it was often able to wield considerable indirect influence. Committee members were particularly opposed to clubs being effectively managed and controlled by a single wealthy individual - the so-called 'one man club'.³⁸ Yet, despite widespread criticism both in the press and in official reports, J. D. Davies (Manchester United) and Samuel Hill-Wood (Glossop) continued to dominate their clubs for the fifteen years prior to the First World War without any attempt by the League executive to force internal reconstruction.³⁹ When

³⁷ See *Thomsen's Weekly News*, 19 March 1910.

³⁸ See *Athletic News*, 4 September 1911.

³⁹ FA Report and Recommendation of the Commission adopted by the Council re. Manchester United FC, 30 March 1910; Mason, *Association Football*, pp. 48-49.

the question of the dual control of clubs was first raised in 1913 the Committee was similarly eager to avoid direct involvement. Sutcliffe rejected the suggestions of rival London clubs that the Committee should intervene to preclude Henry Norris' control of both Arsenal and Fulham by insisting that there was no rule which empowered it to deal with such matters.⁴⁰ However, when in 1931 Arsenal took a financial and administrative interest in third division neighbours Clapton Orient, with the surreptitious intention of transforming the club into a nursery for its young players, the executive immediately intervened. It rejected Arsenal's proposal for the reconstruction of the bankrupt Orient club and, with FA assistance, formulated its own scheme ensuring that the debts be paid off and the club be managed independently by its own board of directors.⁴¹ Yet in the main the Committee seemed anxious not to overstep its authority. When the Aberdare Athletic Supporters' Club asked the League executive to prevent the amalgamation of their club with Aberaman, they were informed that the Committee 'do not... interfere with the domestic arrangements of Clubs so long as the Rules and Regulations of the Football Association and the Football League are observed and the Clubs properly conducted'.⁴² There had been similar caution over an internal dispute within the Bristol City directorate but when it became clear that League regulations had been infringed the Committee launched an inquiry which eventually led to the permanent suspension of six directors. Even then the Committee was unsure about how closely to involve itself in the restructuring of the club and the election of a new directorate. Three members including the president agreed to attend the subsequent meeting of shareholders because, in Sutcliffe's words, 'Although I had grave doubts as to the possibility of being of service to the club, I felt that the shareholders... should know the wishes and intention of the League Management Committee.'⁴³

That the Committee was not always prepared or able to maintain a *laissez-faire* attitude towards the management of its member clubs is clear from the debate

⁴⁰ Minutes of Football League, 26 May 1913 (AGM); Report of Football League AGM in *Athletic News*, 2 June 1913.

⁴¹ Minutes of Football League, 24 August, 14 December 1931, 11 January 1932; Minutes of FA Emergency Committee, 17 March-16 April 1931; Jimmy Seed, *The Jimmy Seed Story*, London, 1957, pp. 21-22.

⁴² Minutes of Football League, 13 December 1926.

⁴³ *Topical Times*, 16 June, 28 July 1923; Minutes of Football League, 14-15 June 1923.

surrounding the future of Huddersfield Town in 1919.⁴⁴ The club had struggled to make financial ends meet since its admission to the League in 1910 and had survived largely as a result of the support of local mill-owning brothers J. Hilton and D. Stonor Crowther who, according to some estimates, had subsidised the club with payments of up to £40,000. But by the beginning of the 1919/20 season, competition from the town's highly successful rugby league club had contributed to meagre gates at Leeds Road; a midweek fixture against Bury raised only £49 and 2,500 spectators paid just £90 for the visit of Fulham on 1 November. Within a week of the Fulham match provisional arrangements had been made with the apparent support of Hilton Crowther and the Huddersfield directors for the complete transfer of the whole operation - players, liabilities and league position included - to nearby Leeds. Although it quickly emerged that there was in fact widespread opposition to the Leeds move from spectators, shareholders and even directors of Huddersfield Town, the Management Committee appeared to align itself immediately with the Crowther camp. The evidence of poor attendances and gate receipts convinced McKenna 'that Huddersfield people... do not want Soccer football' while Sutcliffe believed that as a Football League town 'Huddersfield has failed' and hence the Committee should (and would) endorse the requested move to Leeds.⁴⁵ The Committee eventually ruled that the club had until 8 December (later extended until the end of the month) to repay the £25,000 debt due to Crowther, failing which the transfer to Leeds would go ahead. But opponents of the move, led by the newly-formed Shareholders' and Supporters' Committee and its chairman Amos Brook Hirst, informed the Committee that the application to move had been made without prior consultation with either the club's directors or shareholders.⁴⁶ In their view, Crowther had acted independently and against the wishes of the club and his application was therefore void. The League executive's dismissal of these claims, together with the perceived bias of the Leeds and Manchester press (especially the League mouthpiece *Athletic News*), convinced one Huddersfield director that there was 'a conspiracy' against the club.⁴⁷ In the end,

⁴⁴ For detailed chronological accounts of events see George S. Binns, *Huddersfield Town. 75 Years On*, Huddersfield, 1984, pp. 30-69; Terry Frost, *Huddersfield Town: A Complete Record, 1910-90*, Derby, 1990, pp. 39-46.

⁴⁵ *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 10 November 1919; *Athletic News*, 8 December 1919.

⁴⁶ *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 8 December 1919.

⁴⁷ Opinions of T. H. Kaye and Captain Moore, reported in *Huddersfield Weekly Examiner*, 20 December 1919.

the financial assistance of three local benefactors along with a profitable promotion campaign and FA Cup run proved sufficient to clear the debt and keep the club at Huddersfield. The episode certainly disproved the notion that the Management Committee could always remain impartial and taciturn in the affairs of its member clubs. As the non-Huddersfield press was keen to point out, gate money was no longer a purely domestic issue after the wartime introduction of pooling policies but affected the finances of visiting clubs and the health of the League as a whole (see chapter 7). In this way, the Committee's preference for the Leeds scheme can be seen as a logical - but ultimately unsuccessful - attempt to maintain the quality of membership.

The location and standards of club grounds were other areas in which executive control was slow to develop before the inter-war period. Although the League agreed as early as 1891 not to allow entry to any club with a ground closer than three miles to that of an existing member, clubs were otherwise able to move grounds as and when they wished without receiving prior Committee approval.⁴⁸ As most changes of this kind involved switching to a location within one or two miles of the previous ground - and always in the same town or city - there was rarely opposition from any party. However, when in 1913 the Arsenal club proposed to move from Woolwich to a stadium 14 miles away in north London, immediate objections were raised by Tottenham Hotspur and Clapton Orient, whose grounds were situated within 2 ½ miles of the proposed site. These clubs pressed the Committee to stop the move but it was decided to take no action as 'there is ample population and opportunity for three League clubs within the area' and, more importantly, 'that under the rules and practice of the League there is no right to interfere'.⁴⁹ This clearly enraged the opponents of the move, who remained convinced that even without a precedent for its action it would have been within the Committee's power to intervene. At the next annual meeting Orient's Captain Wells-Holland successfully proposed a rule change ensuring that 'each club shall register its ground with the secretary, and no club shall remove to

⁴⁸ Vamplew, *Pay Up*, p. 137.

⁴⁹ Minutes of Football League, 1 March 1913. Also see Simmons, *History of the Tottenham Hotspur FC*.

another ground without first obtaining the consent of the Management Committee'.⁵⁰ The League's own minutes suggest that ground moves were initially passed by the Committee with little debate or investigation but by the early 1930s Committee members were invariably sent to inspect the proposed ground and stipulate any necessary alterations. Queen's Park Rangers and Clapton Orient were notable for the number of times they were forced to move during this period. In March 1930, for example, Orient gained permission to relocate to the Lea Bridge Speedway Stadium but after failing to fulfil the executive's instructions to extend the playing area to allow sufficient room between the touchlines and perimeter fences they were then told in November that no more League matches could be played on the ground. Another proposed move to the Spotted Dog ground in East London was rejected by the Committee after an inspection and the club spent the next month at temporary home venues, including two visits to Wembley and one to Arsenal's Highbury stadium, before returning to Lea Bridge where the landlords had agreed to add the extra turf.⁵¹

During the first twenty or so years of the League, clubs were generally left to build and develop their grounds as they wished. Only where issues of crowd control were concerned did the Committee seek to intervene, and even then it was reluctant to *order* clubs to make alterations. Significantly, clubs were only *advised* to erect fences or railings around the pitch to prevent crowd encroachment and to provide dressing-room accommodation for officials and visiting teams enabling them to leave the field without fear of assault.⁵² The number of members who actually followed the Committee's advice in cases of this kind is hard to determine. It was reported in 1913 that both Bolton Wanderers and Oldham Athletic were building new dressing-room accommodation 'to be completed to the satisfaction of the League'⁵³ but these may have been isolated instances and certainly did not prevent the continued issuing of

⁵⁰ Report of Football League AGM in *Athletic News*, 2 June 1913; Minutes of Football League, 26 May 1913 (AGM).

⁵¹ Minutes of Football League, 11 March, 5 November 1930; Minutes of West Ham United FC, 25 February, 17 November 1930; Inglis, *Football Grounds*, p. 261.

⁵² Sutcliffe *et al.*, *Football League*, p. 11; *Athletic News*, 9 December 1901, 12 March 1906. If the club failed to follow the executive's advice and crowd disturbances resulted, however, it was obviously liable to ground suspension or other punitive action by the governing body. On this see R. W. Lewis, 'Football Hooliganism in England before 1914: A Critique of the Dunning Thesis', *IJHS*, 13, 3, 1996, pp. 310-39.

⁵³ Minutes of Football League, 9 May 1913.

recommendations rather than commands relating particularly to inadequate provision for visiting teams and match officials.⁵⁴ The influx of the new associate members in the early 1920s, however, led the Committee to develop tighter controls over the standard of ground facilities. Prospective candidates for the third division northern section were expected to replace inadequate accommodation for spectators and provide comfortable dressing-room facilities attached to the ground. Regular visits and reports by Committee members ensured that Wigan Borough, Accrington Stanley, Halifax Town and Walsall amongst others undertook re-building projects to bring their grounds up to the standard required by the Committee before the start of their first League season. In 1927 each club applying for membership was instructed to send details of its ground's holding capacity, stand and covered accommodation and dressing-room facilities. Any candidate failing to meet the Committee's recognised standards - uncodified but established by convention over previous years - was unlikely to be recommended at the annual elections.⁵⁵ The executive was also known to step in to ensure that the standard of the playing field itself was maintained. Poor pitch conditions on a number of grounds at the end of the 1928/29 season led the Committee to insist that 'during the close season there shall be no sub-letting or usage of the ground which will interfere with the playing pitch'. This undoubtedly cost many clubs an important source of extra revenue: West Ham was not the only club forced to forego a substantial offer - £2,500 in this case - to host summer speedway racing at its ground.⁵⁶

Indeed, in other respects, too, the Committee monitored the commercial activities of its members, especially when these involved association with that perennial bugbear of the football authorities: gambling. League officials had from the early days followed the lead of the FA in condemning any direct or indirect association with all forms of betting. Before the First World War expressions of general opposition to coupon betting and sweepstakes were common but it was left to the FA to take more

⁵⁴ See Minutes of Football League, 13 January 1913.

⁵⁵ Sheffield United FC Programme, 6 September 1920; Minutes of Football League, 10 January, 1-2 July 1921, 8 April 1927 (SGM); Inglis, *League Football*, p. 125.

⁵⁶ *Topical Times*, 17 March 1928; Minutes of Football League, 5 March 1928; Minutes of West Ham United FC, 28 February, 6 March 1928.

direct action against perpetrators.⁵⁷ Yet after the war the Committee appears to have clamped down more strongly on any club activity associated with betting. Sweepstakes for fund-raising or other purposes were explicitly forbidden and advertisements for pools companies on Crystal Palace's ground and in Newport's programme were ordered to be removed.⁵⁸ The emergence of dog racing as a popular working-class sport in the late 1920s and early 1930s presented new problems. Some clubs in financial difficulties were keen to take advantage of the added income that could be generated from staging regular greyhound racing and either rented out their ground to separate companies or, in the case of the east London Orient and Thames clubs, actually moved to greyhound stadiums as tenants. After initially advocating the prohibition of greyhound racing on members' grounds in line with its Scottish counterpart, the FA Council in conference with the League Management Committee ultimately agreed 'that it was a domestic matter [for] the clubs'.⁵⁹ However, this did not stop the Committee independently condemning dog racing as 'a menace to our game' and, on the instruction of the majority its members, allowing only clubs with established agreements by 1932 to continue staging racing.⁶⁰

From 1890 the Committee set a minimum admission price of 6d. (boys under 14 and women excepted) for ground entry which rapidly became a standard charge across the League. Higher entry fees were of course charged for grandstand seats and clubs invariably increased prices across the board for important cup-ties, though rarely for comparable League games.⁶¹ But the available evidence indicates that the majority of spectators from London to Newcastle paid the same 6d. to watch League matches, a price which was increased to 9d. in 1917 to cover the new Entertainment Tax and then rose to 1s. after the First World War. Deviations from the League minimum were rare. Cardiff City briefly flirted with an increased entry fee of 1s. 3d. at the beginning of the 1920s in order to cover increased wages and travelling expenses but the

⁵⁷ Clapson, *Popular Gambling*, pp. 168-69; Minutes of Football League, 24 February 1913.

⁵⁸ Minutes of Football League, 5 December 1921, 23 October 1922, 17 October 1927.

⁵⁹ FA Minute Books, Minutes of Evidence of Royal Commission on Lotteries and Betting, 1 December 1932; Minutes of FA Council, 25 June, 10 October 1932.

⁶⁰ Inglis, *League Football*, p. 137; Minutes of West Ham United FC, 7 November 1932; Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 9 November 1932.

⁶¹ Vamplew, *Pay Up*, pp. 81-82.

Committee refused on this and subsequent occasions to force changes centrally.⁶² On the other hand, some clubs faced considerable pressure to reduce prices for the unemployed during periods of industrial hardship. In 1921 Barrow were cautioned for admitting unemployed spectators free of charge, a decision which led to crowd disturbances as fences were broken down by groups intent on forcing entry to the ground. This experience probably influenced the executive's decision to reject the request of several clubs who wanted to allow reduced admission on the production of unemployment cards.⁶³ During the 1930s the Sheffield clubs among others cut prices where they could to offset the impact of local economic depression. Boys were admitted for 3d. rather than 4d. at first team matches at both Hillsborough and Bramall Lane from late 1932 and similar reductions were made in stand and season ticket prices for the 1933/34 season, but efforts to reduce prices for workless adults were obstinately opposed at Committee level. When Sheffield United proposed to halve prices for the unemployed at League matches in 1933 the Committee informed the club of its objection in advance and only three members backed the proposal at the annual meeting. United joined the campaign instigated by the Southampton Supporters' Club for a 'sixpenny' gate the following year but failed again to receive sufficient club support.⁶⁴ Other clubs were evidently less affected financially by the loss of unemployed spectators and were thus less willing to move away from established pricing structures. When faced with calls to cut admission the West Ham directors pleaded that they were powerless to act as their prices were 'fixed by the associations under which we play'.⁶⁵

At times the executive was accused of acting in the manner of a press censor by controlling the supply of information from the club to the broader public. A major target of this censorship was the official club programme, notwithstanding the fact that clubs often disclaimed responsibility for what was printed by the nominally independent programme editor. For example, in 1905 the Committee forced the Stoke

⁶² *Athletic News*, 9 August 1920, 26 May 1924.

⁶³ Minutes of Football League, 23 September, 4 November, 5 December 1921, 29 May 1922 (AGM). Also see comments in *Albion News*, 27 August 1921.

⁶⁴ Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 6 December 1932; 29 March, 2 May, 7 June, 3 July 1933; 6 February 1934. Also see Fishwick, *English Football*, p. 50.

⁶⁵ Minutes of West Ham United FC, 2 April 1935.

programme editor and club secretary H. D. Austerberry to withdraw the charges he had made of bias in the appointment of League referees. The Committee's action did not escape criticism: Austerberry felt he had 'as much right as members of the... Committee to write generally on a system to which he objected' and *Athletic News* expressed its amusement at 'the extremely autocratic attitude' of the executive towards a small, private football publication.⁶⁶ Similar retractions and apologies were demanded when first Hull City in 1912 and then West Ham in 1921 used the club programme to criticise the playing methods of opponents.⁶⁷ The Committee was again denounced by critics for its autocratic action following a series of incidents in 1920. First, Chelsea was brought to book for printing 'an offensive paragraph' in the club programme relating to the workings of a League Commission.⁶⁸ Second, clubs were instructed not to disclose their gate money to the public and, finally, two clubs were fined for breaching League rules by providing meals for match officials. For the Bolton newspaper *Football Field* the Committee's behaviour was unnecessary and tactically ill-judged: 'It is possible to rule with too hard a hand'.⁶⁹

While *Football Field's* perception of the Management Committee as an increasingly autocratic body was not universally shared, there can be little doubt that League clubs between the wars were more tightly-regulated than ever before. In addition to laying down conditions relating to the fundamentals of club management - players' transfers and payments, grounds and commercial activities etc. - the executive also sought to monitor and control the minutiae of club life. From the beginning of the period club colours had to be registered with the League secretary and from 1909 goalkeepers were required to wear a jersey in one of three (later four) colours and distinct from the shirts of both competing teams. Initially these regulations seemed either to be ignored or not taken seriously by clubs and match officials but the Committee began to issue small fines and warned in late 1913 that 'in future all clubs not complying with the rule will be severely dealt with'.⁷⁰ At the start of each season clubs could apply to change their official colours but playing in unauthorised colours without permission

⁶⁶ *Athletic News*, 6 February 1905.

⁶⁷ Minutes of Football League, 2 December 1912, 17 January 1921.

⁶⁸ Minutes of Football League, 11 October 1920.

⁶⁹ Quoted in Sheffield United FC Programme, 30 October 1920.

⁷⁰ Minutes of Football League, 3 November 1913.

became a disciplinary offence in the same bracket (though not with the same punishment) as more serious misdemeanours such as unauthorised payments to players.⁷¹ Perhaps the most important aspect of any members clubs' identity - its name - was also subject to registration by the Committee, with alterations needing Committee approval. Although the Committee rarely did more than simply rubber-stamp name changes, this itself could be a convoluted affair, as when the newly-elected Boscombe club applied to alter its name to Bournemouth United but within a month requested another name change to Bournemouth and Boscombe Athletic.⁷² By the 1930s, then, substantial and crucial areas of club activity were subject to central regulation and many decisions taken by a club's board of directors had first to be registered and sanctioned by Preston before being put into motion. And while clubs such as Aston Villa and Accrington Stanley were clearly very different organisations so far as playing success, financial resources and administrative influence were concerned, they were nevertheless increasingly directed by common standards and procedures which in certain respects undermined the essential specificity of clubs. An indication of this emphasis on standardisation within the Football League is provided by the decision of the Management Committee to make the use of elliptical goal posts mandatory for the 1939/40 season, significantly over six years before the FA officially approved of their use.⁷³

The most visible strand of the Committee's power over clubs was probably its disciplinary function. Here again the executive became less hesitant and arguably more severe in its treatment of clubs after the First World War. While fines imposed for simple administrative slackness, such as the late arrival of result slips or transfer documents, remained fairly constant, penalties for more serious breaches of rule rose sharply. For example, FA Cup finalists Everton and Newcastle United were both fined £50 for fielding 'unrepresentative' teams for League matches towards the end of the 1905/06 season; by 1912 £100 and £150 were more common penalties.⁷⁴ Indeed, before 1924 League rules prohibited the Committee issuing fines exceeding £150 but when Newcastle were found guilty of playing weak teams in no less than seven

⁷¹ See, for instance, Minutes of Football League, 15 November 1912; 22 September 1922.

⁷² Minutes of Football League, 14-15 June, 6 July 1923.

⁷³ Minutes of Huddersfield Town FC, 25 April 1939; Inglis, *Football Grounds*, p. 55.

⁷⁴ *Athletic News*, 23 April 1906; Minutes of Football League, 10 May 1912.

League fixtures during their victorious FA Cup run, a massive £750 fine was imposed and the Committee was henceforth given the freedom to exact 'such fine as they shall think fit'.⁷⁵ This incident reflected a distinct tightening up on matters of club discipline, a policy which had been explicitly revealed by McKenna at the previous annual meeting. He told club representatives that

there were some members who abused the rules and tried to evade them. In the past there had been some drastic sentences, but he was confident that they were only forerunners of greater unless the rules were kept. Any club that could not carry out the rules must suffer, and so far as he was concerned they would suffer severely if found guilty. (Applause)⁷⁶

In theory, the expulsion of a club from the League was a matter for the members collectively. A simple majority at the annual meeting could vote to exclude any club whose conduct was deemed 'objectionable'. Yet as in many other areas, in practice such matters were left for the Committee to investigate and ultimately decide. There is little doubt that expelling a club was considered a drastic measure and a last resort: only one club suffered this fate before 1939 and then under peculiar circumstances. Following a series of fines and suspensions in 1911, Middlesbrough was formally warned by the Committee that further offences would mean immediate expulsion but despite some newspaper pressure it was always likely that the club would be given a reprieve.⁷⁷ When the executive did actually expel a member - Leeds City in 1919 - it was not so much for breaking League rules as for challenging its authority.⁷⁸ A tip-off from a former Leeds player led the League and the FA to organise a joint commission to investigate alleged illegal payments to players during the war. Such investigations were certainly not uncommon and, if the allegations had been proven, it is likely that certain directors and players would have found themselves heavily fined and temporarily suspended. There would have been no precedent, however, for expelling the club itself. The reason for this was undoubtedly the refusal of club directors to hand over a set of documents, including the accounts from 1916-18, as required by

⁷⁵ *Athletic News*, 26 May 1924; Report of Football League AGM in *Athletic News*, 9 June 1924.

⁷⁶ Report of Football League AGM in *Athletic News*, 4 June 1923.

⁷⁷ Football League Commission report on Middlesbrough FC, printed in *Athletic News*, 5 June 1911; *Athletic News*, 19 June 1911.

⁷⁸ See Arnold, 'Leeds City'; Jarred and MacDonald, *Leeds United*, pp. 344-48.

both League and FA rules. As *Athletic News* noted in its editorial, by refusing to obey the commission's orders Leeds City had 'automatically suspended themselves'.⁷⁹ Some critics of the expulsion, notably the Lord Mayor of Leeds, Joseph Henry, believed that the League representatives on the commission were instrumental in persuading the FA members to expel rather than fine the club, partly as a result of pressure from the aspiring Port Vale club who hoped to fill Leeds' place.⁸⁰ In his investigation of the affair, Arnold explained the commission's action as 'a dramatic gesture by men who knew they had badly misjudged the political symbolism of professional soccer in the early years of the Great War'.⁸¹ While both explanations probably contain elements of truth, the decision on the League's part, at least, was entirely in keeping with the Management Committee's emerging self-confidence and disciplinary zeal. For a Committee increasingly intent on asserting its authority and stamping out irregularities, member clubs could certainly not be allowed to ignore established procedures and, more importantly, publicly defy commands.

4. Breakaways, Division and the Problems of Loyalty

It is hardly surprising that division and disunity emerged as perennial problems for an amalgamation of sporting clubs, or a business cartel, as large and diverse as the Football League. What is in fact notable is that the League managed to avoid the type of split in its membership which the Northern Rugby Football Union experienced in 1901⁸², as well as the almost annual secession of individual clubs which plagued the rival Southern League throughout the period. The role of the Management Committee was important in this respect due to its relative success in quickly identifying sources of discontent and ruthlessly suppressing consequent dissension.

During the 1890s and the early twentieth century the League authorities were confronted with several breakaway scares among its member clubs. Most of this agitation came from Lancashire, whose major clubs appear to have taken some time to become convinced of the organisational and economic merits of League membership.

⁷⁹ *Athletic News*, 20 October 1919.

⁸⁰ *Football and Sports Special*, 1 November 1919.

⁸¹ Arnold, 'Leeds City', p. 117.

⁸² See Moorhouse, *A People's Game*, p. 60.

As early as 1891 Blackburn Rovers, Accrington, and (according to one account) championship leaders Everton, were all called upon to deny press remarks that they were intending to leave the Football League to form a separate Lancashire 'super league'. The inquiry established to investigate the claims resolved that 'in future any alleged grievances be brought forward in a constitutional and regular manner' and warned potential malcontents that 'any similar occurrence will be dealt with the utmost severity'.⁸³ Three years later the Blackburn chairman Dr. Morley still maintained that the League 'had not been an unmixed blessing. With one or two exceptions there was hardly a League club who could pay 20 s. in the pound when called upon in an emergency'.⁸⁴ 1895 witnessed another major crisis after a secret meeting of midlands clubs led to an alleged attempt at regional *en bloc* voting at the annual meeting. Reaction within Lancashire again included suggestions of withdrawal and the creation of a district league with less travel and lower wage bills but the League executive acted quickly to condemn both movements and urge loyalty and the preservation of unity.⁸⁵ While these instances may have realistically threatened the existence of a still relatively young organisation, by the turn of the century the idea of a mass breakaway of Lancashire clubs, at least, had become less viable. Indeed, when Councillor Booth-Sharples, president of the Lancashire League, attempted to persuade the Football League's red-rose members to secede in late 1901, his suggestion was dismissed as undesirable and impractical by the press and seems to have been barely considered by the clubs themselves.⁸⁶

There were also occasional fears that southern clubs were intent on leaving the League, which for the most part centred around the activities of a single club: Arsenal. Arsenal held a particularly important - almost symbolic - position amongst the League membership as the first southern-based club to join (in 1893) and, before 1905, the sole representative from the capital. For this reason rumours of secession or alleged attempts to lure the Arsenal away to the Southern League were fairly common, particularly during the 1890s and early 1900s, although there is little evidence

⁸³ Sutcliffe *et al.*, *Football League*, p. 7; R. W. Lewis, 'The Development of Professional Football in Lancashire, 1870-1914', Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Lancaster, 1993, p. 213.

⁸⁴ Catton Folders, B, Report of Blackburn Rovers FC Annual Meeting, 22 June 1894, p. 89.

⁸⁵ Catton, *The Real Football*, p. 93; Lewis, 'Professional Football in Lancashire', p. 215.

⁸⁶ *Athletic News*, 16 December 1901.

available to indicate how seriously the club itself regarded the idea. To take just one example, during the summer of 1901 the Arsenal executive and shareholders were called upon to publicly profess their loyalty to the Football League amid press statements that they were on the verge of resigning their membership.⁸⁷ But perhaps more serious than this was the position of those clubs who became members of the London Combination during the First World War. While some authors have speculated wildly with limited evidence that the metropolitan clubs were prepared to split from the League in early 1919⁸⁸, there were nevertheless some signs of a growing independence emanating from London at this time. The five London clubs had certainly acted against the wishes of Sutcliffe and other Committee members when initially deciding to compete in the London Combination in 1915: Arsenal's chairman Henry Norris had explicitly asserted their collective right 'to play under the jurisdiction of that league without asking anybody'. And, while voluntarily contributing to the League's depleted funds and pledging their continued loyalty to that body, they still resisted a number of requests to rejoin League competition during the hostilities.⁸⁹ However, it is doubtful whether the idea of a post-war London League was ever really more than a bargaining device to help certain clubs regain first division status in an enlarged competition. There was certainly the feeling, expressed by some London newspapers, that a failure to allow Chelsea to retain a first division place, after being relegated as a result of an 'arranged' match prior to the war, might encourage a movement towards independence; Arsenal, too, had shown a degree of sympathy for the wage and contract demands of the militant London Players' Union, which suggested to some a potential break from the League if the club were not elected to the first division. Other clubs, though, including Tottenham Hotspur, publicly denied any intention of wishing to join a new London League and the idea rapidly disappeared when both Chelsea and, more controversially, Arsenal were admitted to the top division.⁹⁰

More common than breakaway movements or threats were less conspicuous expressions of independence such as unofficial meetings of clubs. The organisation

⁸⁷ *Athletic News*, 20 May, 3 June 1901.

⁸⁸ See particularly Inglis, *League Football*, pp. 113-14.

⁸⁹ Report of Football League AGM in *Athletic News*, 26 July 1915; *Athletic News*, 10 July 1916.

⁹⁰ Harding, *Good of the Game*, London, 1991, p. 126; *Athletic News*, 3 February 1919.

of meetings which allowed League members to discuss FA rules and related matters, often culminating in an agreed collective policy, were well established by the start of the century but really came to the fore in the context of the debates over wage and bonus payments in the 1900s. In May 1904, for example, Everton called a meeting to discuss bonus payments to players; almost three years later Manchester City convened a further series of meetings to attempt to resolve that issue and the related maximum wage question but agreement could not be reached and it was decided that 'clubs must take independent steps in the matter'.⁹¹ For the most part these meetings were arranged independently and without the necessary sanction or even the knowledge of the League executive and there seems to have been little attempt by the latter to orchestrate such forums or influence their outcome. An exception to this was Bentley's personal interjection in early 1909 over the collective response to the FA's proposed amnesty to clubs making illegal payments to players. Following six months of wavering and unsuccessful conferences, Bentley issued a circular calling an informal meeting of club representatives - he emphasised that it was not an official League meeting - to resolve the issue, which eventually led to unanimous acceptance of the amnesty.⁹²

Meetings called to discuss League rather than FA matters naturally elicited a very different response from the Management Committee. As we have seen, there were established constitutional procedures whereby member clubs could band together to request a full League meeting to discuss important issues and the Committee therefore reacted angrily on the rare occasions when clubs chose to meet outside its jurisdiction. A notable example came in 1909, when two private and unauthorised meetings of midlands and Yorkshire clubs were arranged prior to that season's annual meeting. The main purpose of the gatherings, it would appear, was to agree on a collective approach towards the Management Committee elections and to remedy the perceived dominance of Lancastrian representatives.⁹³ Echoing the events of 1895, the

⁹¹ Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 17 May 1904; 27 February, 20 March, 2 April 1907.

⁹² Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 26 August 1908, 10 February 1909; *Athletic News*, 1, 8 February 1909.

⁹³ Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 4 May 1909; *Athletic News*, 17 May 1909; *Football and Sports Special*, 5 June 1909.

Lancashire clubs followed with their own regional meeting and the London contingent were reported to have done likewise. This separatist activity was strongly condemned by the executive. For Bentley, there could be no objection to clubs gathering to discuss League matters which directly affected them

but when it came to a section of the clubs convening a meeting which comprised the majority of the League clubs to settle certain matters in connection with the management of the League,... it was a grave affair... As a matter of principle, such proceedings are entirely wrong.⁹⁴

Little had changed when a clique of midlands and Yorkshire clubs met in 1913 under similar circumstances at Leeds 'to consider the question of better representation on the Management Committee'.⁹⁵

The machinery of official League meetings appears to have successfully contained even the more dissident directors and club officials for most of the 1920s but by 1930 the dilatory nature of decision-making had sparked another wave of independently organised club gatherings. This time the meetings were neither secret nor restricted along regional lines. In April of that year two leading clubs, Arsenal and Huddersfield Town, issued a joint circular to all full members (i.e. first and second division clubs) calling a meeting to consider issues ranging from the release of players for international matches through to the voting power of third division clubs and even the reform of the throw-in law. Though these covered FA as well as League matters, the seven resolutions carried by the meeting were sent initially to the Management Committee for consideration; the Committee accepted them all in principle and adopted or agreed to act upon those within its jurisdiction.⁹⁶ However, when the most significant of these resolutions - the discontinuance of Saturday dates for all but the England-Scotland international fixture - was debated at the annual meeting in June the Committee surprisingly withdrew its support which, after a club vote, forced the backers similarly to retract from this proposed alteration of FA rules.⁹⁷ But the matter was not allowed to rest there. In December Huddersfield's opinionated chairman

⁹⁴ Report of Football League AGM in *Athletic News*, 14 June 1909.

⁹⁵ Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 29 April 1913.

⁹⁶ Report of Meeting of Football League Clubs, First and Second Division, 4 April 1930.

⁹⁷ Minutes of Football League, 2 June 1930 (AGM).

Amos Brook Hirst, who had previously crossed swords with the Management Committee as a result of his club's financial crisis of 1919, organised another meeting of League clubs ostensibly 'to discuss matters generally'⁹⁸ but with the real purpose of re-opening the debate over the release of international players. In the opinion of the Committee this was a serious offence which threatened disorder and questioned its overall authority within the League. In a letter to Brook Hirst the Committee expressed its view that the meeting

may be regarded as lacking in courtesy to the President and the Committee and... be thought suggestive of disloyalty and... lead to difficulty with matters under the consideration and jurisdiction of the Committee... As the members of the Management Committee have not been invited there is the further impression that their presence at the meeting is not desired.

If the clubs had wanted such a meeting, the letter went on, it was surely the responsibility of the Committee itself to arrange it.⁹⁹ Some clubs evidently shared the executive's misgivings. Sheffield United had initially refused to send a representative to the meeting and even though two Committee members were then persuaded to attend, the club later informed Brook Hirst that 'the matter would be better settled if the Management Committee would call a Special Meeting of the Clubs to consider the same when the whole of the Clubs would be present'.¹⁰⁰ A settlement was eventually reached between the League and the national associations in January 1931 which partially fulfilled the stated demands of the leading clubs, although Saturday internationals remained (see chapter 8). Yet the important point here is that these events set a precedent for independent club meetings which, while still generally opposed by the executive, nonetheless became an accepted practice among discontented groups of clubs, especially (as we shall see) during the so-called 'Pools War' of 1936.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 2 December 1930.

⁹⁹ Minutes of Football League, 5 December 1930.

¹⁰⁰ Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 2, 10, 30 December 1930.

¹⁰¹ Take, for instance, the meetings of League clubs instigated by Manchester City in 1935 to discuss issues including broadcasting and the Committee's proposed 'two referees system'. Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 24 April, 7 May 1935.

The First World War was undoubtedly a crucial period in the development of relations between the League and its clubs, although Inglis' view that the League emerged in 1918 as a more tightly-bound and unified organisation than ever before is highly debatable.¹⁰² The evidence for this seems to be based largely on the proclamations of the Committee itself and especially the habitual references to the 'loyalty' of members towards the League. In a circular to clubs in September 1914, for instance, the Committee launched its Relief Scheme aimed to help members in financial distress through mandatory contributions from clubs and players into a common fund. Reflecting broader sentiments about the commitment of individuals and groups to the national cause in wartime, the circular suggested that:

The loyalty of the League clubs cannot be questioned. At heart we are faithful adherents to the League spirit. In a critical period in the history of the game devotion to the League is of paramount importance. Our personal and individual interests must be sacrificed to the common good.¹⁰³

Yet in many ways the language of 'loyalty' disguised some fundamental conflicts and differences of opinion which persisted throughout the war years. Above all, it needs to be remembered that a small but significant group of leading clubs took no part whatsoever in the League's modified system of regional competitions from 1915/16. The west midlands triumvirate of Aston Villa, Wolverhampton Wanderers and West Bromwich Albion, in particular, felt from the beginning that the Committee's pleas for 'loyalty' ought not to distract clubs from more pressing concerns: 'There came a time when there were greater interests either than The League or football. In their opinion such a time had now arrived'. At the 1915 annual meeting Villa's chairman unsuccessfully moved 'That no matches be played under the auspices of The Football League during the continuance of the war, and that The League clubs be allowed to play what matches they desired'.¹⁰⁴ So along with Sunderland and Middlesbrough these clubs effectively closed down for the duration of the war. And if we add the five London clubs who achieved a kind of semi-autonomy as members of the London

¹⁰² Inglis, *League Football*, p. 101.

¹⁰³ Quoted in Sutcliffe *et al.*, *Football League*, p. 83.

¹⁰⁴ Report of Football League AGM in *Athletic News*, 26 July 1915.

Combination, it is it hard to see how the League could be regarded at this point as 'a strong, confident organisation with almost complete mastery of its members'.¹⁰⁵

Indeed, there was only limited support for the wartime organisation of the League even among those clubs who continued to participate in its competitions. While the majority of clubs at the critical 1915 annual meeting agreed 'that some kind of football should be played', many also expressed their preference for organising their own fixtures with local opponents rather than participating in competitions run by the League. Everton's representative W. R. Clayton thought that the League 'should close their doors until the war was over, but clubs should have the liberty to make their own arrangements irrespective of The League or any other organisation'.¹⁰⁶ Despite subsequently accepting League control over the regionalised wartime tournaments in principle, some clubs were more reluctant than before the war to acquiesce to the central authority of the Management Committee in practice. Certainly, if Sutcliffe and others expected their schemes for the financial relief of necessitous clubs and the pooling of gates to automatically bind the members tighter to the League structure they were to be disappointed. At the 1916 annual meeting a group of the richer clubs led by Everton effectively held the League to ransom by threatening to withdraw and form a separate section if the pooling system introduced the previous season was not abandoned. This was no idle threat as Everton, Liverpool, Manchester City and Blackburn Rovers from the Lancashire section along with Sheffield United and Wednesday, Bradford City and Park Avenue and Birmingham from the Midlands had all apparently intimated willingness in private correspondence to form an independent competition which would allow them to retain all of their own gate receipts.¹⁰⁷ On the other hand, the move away from gate pooling led to agitation among some of the poorer clubs, including a conference organised by the Bury directors and attended by McKenna in which it was claimed that many members would not be able to survive without the extra financial income derived from the League 'pool'. The Barnsley board actually informed its counterparts in the Midlands Supplementary Competition

¹⁰⁵ Inglis, *League Football*, p. 101.

¹⁰⁶ Report of Football League AGM in *Athletic News*, 26 July 1915.

¹⁰⁷ Report of Football League AGM in *Athletic News*, 24 July 1916; *Athletic News*, 7 August 1916.

that they would refuse to take part if pooling was not re-introduced.¹⁰⁸ Further conflict was avoided when the richer clubs agreed to gate pooling as a temporary wartime measure but even then Everton and other Lancastrian clubs refused to pool gate receipts across both sections: Clayton, for one, was 'not prepared to finance the Midland clubs; they must look after themselves'.¹⁰⁹ Even in wartime, then, loyalty to the League was never unconditional and the Committee's control over its membership was often fragile.

The creation of the third division southern and northern sections at the beginning of the 1920s produced a particular set of tensions between the Committee and the new associate members. These clubs were not initially entitled to vote or be represented at general meetings, although subsequently the Committee allowed each section to send two representatives to meetings in which issues directly affecting them were to be discussed. The Committee also managed the general affairs of each section, ran each competition and had the power to allocate clubs to the respective sections after the relegation and promotion issues had been settled and new clubs had been elected by the full members.¹¹⁰ The problems inherent in such an arrangement were foreseen by one first division director even as the southern section clubs were admitted in June 1920. He 'thought the spirit of democracy would demand that the members of the Third Division should eventually take a part in the control of the organisation, and they had to consider whether it was advisable to have any access of voting strength'. Yet while Sutcliffe accepted that more participation by associate members in the running of their own divisions and the League in general would 'evolve with time', this did not prevent a growing dissatisfaction with their treatment by the Committee.¹¹¹ In 1925 moves to increase the number of clubs promoted from the third to second divisions and exempt associate members from the early qualifying rounds of the FA Cup were scotched by the Committee before either matter could be brought before the full members.¹¹²

¹⁰⁸ *Athletic News*, 1, 15 January 1917; Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 14 March 1917.

¹⁰⁹ *Athletic News*, 17 July 1917.

¹¹⁰ Sutcliffe *et al.*, *Football League*, pp. 95-96.

¹¹¹ Comments of Everton's W. R. Clayton and Sutcliffe from Report of Football League AGM in *Athletic News*, 7 June 1920.

¹¹² Minutes of Football League, 6 February, 3 April 1925.

This simmering tension finally boiled over the following year. Both sections had formed independent executive committees and submitted further schemes for the reorganisation of the FA Cup competition which the Management Committee regarded as 'palpably prejudicial' to the interests of the clubs of the top divisions. Moreover, the northern section's executive had evidently issued a circular stating that so long as voting rights were denied 'our decision as to membership is entitled to be very seriously considered'.¹¹³ In the course of a lengthy statement to its full members, the Committee responded with what *Athletic News* described as a 'severe castigation' of the third division clubs.¹¹⁴ Voting and representation rights, it was stated, would not enable third division clubs to change League policy or the constitution but they could 'effectively clog the wheels of progress and thwart changes desired by the first and second division clubs'. The Committee's conclusion was unambiguous:

Unless the Clubs of the Third Division are content with the Rules governing them and the control and government exercised by us, and frankly express their intention to remain loyal to the League and its Management Committee, the obvious course is to decline to continue their connection with you as Associate members. These Sectional Committees might be helpful but if their policy has to be critical and interfere with our control we must ask for their immediate disbandment.¹¹⁵

Though the southern clubs in particular thought the Committee had been 'somewhat unkind' to them, they had little choice but to fall in line with these demands and pledge their loyalty to the League.¹¹⁶

Nevertheless, the associate members continued to risk the wrath of the executive by pressing for their ultimate goals of full membership and direct representation. The lead now came mostly from the south, as the senior, more financially secure and self-confident of the two sections. In 1928 Millwall, newly-promoted to the second division, proposed that the top five clubs in the southern section be granted a vote at all League meetings. This, argued Millwall's chairman Tom Thorne, was justified by

¹¹³ Minutes of Football League, 7 June 1926 (AGM).

¹¹⁴ Report of Football League AGM in *Athletic News*, 14 June 1925.

¹¹⁵ Minutes of Football League, 7 June 1926 (AGM).

¹¹⁶ Minutes of Football League, (Third Division Northern and Southern Section Fixture Meetings), 7 June 1926.

the general practice in other organisations - including the FA - where associate members were automatically promoted to full membership after a stipulated period so long as their conduct had been satisfactory. For Thorne, the continual denial of third division representation reflected the autocracy of the League leadership: 'No other sporting body do I know where such clubs... would be treated as though they were not to be trusted to have a voice in the management'.¹¹⁷ McKenna ruled the proposal out of order but the reasons given seem to indicate a softening in attitude towards the issue. There was no explicit objection to the proposal in principle but it was explained that it would breach those FA rules which restricted the size of a league to 44 full members.¹¹⁸ In fact the following year it was the Committee itself who brought forward a scheme to give each section two representatives 'with power to speak and vote' at general meetings.¹¹⁹ Although passed by the League, the scheme failed to gain FA approval and it thus took further pressure - this time from the first and second division clubs - to finally force a change in the FA's regulations for the sanction of leagues to allow associate members even this limited representation.¹²⁰

On balance it is clear that the relationship between the Management Committee and the clubs was relatively harmonious and conflict-free. Grievances at certain Committee decisions were of course not uncommon but in general these do not seem to have given rise to a more widespread dissatisfaction with the management of the organisation. Indeed, the idea of passing a formal vote of censure on the Committee was never seriously considered at any point in this period. When in 1911 a Manchester City director attempted to pass a resolution criticising the Committee's interpretation of the rule concerning transfer deadlines he was forced by the president and other representatives to either move a vote of censure or back down. The resolution was immediately withdrawn with the proposer disclaiming 'any idea of censuring the Management Committee'.¹²¹ The events surrounding the so-called 'Pools War' of 1936 certainly provide the most revealing example of open conflict

¹¹⁷ *Athletic News*, 28 May 1928.

¹¹⁸ Minutes of Football League, 4 June 1928 (AGM).

¹¹⁹ Minutes of Football League, 3 June 1929 (AGM).

¹²⁰ Minutes of Football League, 28-29 June 1929, 2 June 1930 (AGM); Minutes of FA Emergency Committee, 21 June-19 August 1929; Report of Meeting of Football League Clubs, First and Second Division, 4 April 1930.

¹²¹ Report of Football League AGM in *Athletic News*, 5 June 1911.

between the League executive and a group of member clubs. It is not necessary here to detail the precise chronology of events or to examine the attitudes of those involved towards the football pools in particular and betting in general.¹²² What is of interest, however, is the virtual breakdown of relations within the League for a little over a fortnight as a result of the Committee's attempts to destroy the pools companies. In purely constitutional terms the Committee did seem initially to have a mandate for its action. At a private meeting of clubs on 20 February 1936 the Committee was formally empowered 'to take such steps as it deems expedient to bring about the suppression of betting'.¹²³ At the same time Sutcliffe outlined his plan to change the original fixtures-lists and withhold the alterations for long enough each week to prevent the pools companies from printing and distributing coupons. Yet although the large majority of clubs - 64 of the 85 present - had voted to allow the Committee to proceed with this plan, there were voices of dissension raised almost immediately. The Leeds United board, led by the most vocal of the malcontents Alderman Alf Masser, issued a public statement decrying the Committee's action of cancelling fixtures as 'futile'; Manchester City resolved to oppose the proposals at future meetings 'in every shape and form'. Sunderland, Derby County and a number of anonymous club directors all joined the criticism and there was some talk of collective action to reverse the original decision.¹²⁴

More serious perhaps than this straightforward condemnation of the Committee's plans was the suggestion by Masser and others that the decisions reached at the 20 February meeting contravened a number of the League's own rules. At a conference of those northern clubs who had already expressed their opposition to the Committee - Manchester City, Stoke, Blackburn Rovers and Newcastle United as well as Leeds and Sunderland - Sutcliffe was accused of breaching three separate rules. First, the intention to rearrange fixtures which had already been confirmed at the annual fixtures meeting would be a breach of Rule 23. Second, despite the fact that associate members could only vote collectively under Rule 3, the Committee had allowed

¹²² For detailed accounts of this kind, see Inglis, *Soccer in the Dock*, chapter 7 or an almost identical account in his *League Football*, chapter 14. Also see Archie Ledbrooke and Edgar Turner, *Soccer from the Press Box*, London, 1955, pp. 70-74. Much of the following is based on these sources.

¹²³ Inglis, *League Football*, p. 149.

¹²⁴ *Daily Mirror*, 22, 24 February 1936; *The Times*, 26 February 1936.

individual votes to each third division club representative. Finally, by calling the meeting at less than the required seven days' notice, and without a full agenda available to clubs in advance, Rule 80 had also been broken. Some clubs argued that they had therefore not been fully prepared to consider such an important question. The fact that the Committee had also rejected the request of those representatives 'who desired the opportunity of conferring with their co-directors on proposals of such a revolutionary character' particularly vexed certain members.¹²⁵

As a direct challenge to the Committee's policy, then, these clubs called a rebel meeting of all full members for the following Monday, March 2, at Leeds Town Hall - scheduled purposely for the same day as a Committee gathering in London. Opposition to the League gathered pace with no less than 36 of the 44 member clubs sending representatives to Leeds, including, ironically, seven clubs associated with Committee members. The experience of the first Saturday of rearranged fixtures had further embittered a number of clubs whose attendances were either well down or - in the case of five clubs whose new opponents were due to play in FA Cup ties - had no fixture at all. While maintaining the rhetoric of 'loyalty' to the League and the Management Committee and showing appreciation of 'the great services rendered by them'¹²⁶, the clubs showed determination and virtual unanimity in their objective to reverse League policy. With no votes against and just ten abstentions, the meeting resolved 'that while they accepted that the Management Committee had been given a mandate to scrap the fixtures, the clubs now urged the restoration of the fixtures and a return to the *status quo ante bellum*'.¹²⁷ In these circumstances there was little the Committee could do but bow to the collective will of its membership. At an official League meeting a week later the Leeds resolution was unanimously passed and it was agreed that the original fixtures be immediately resumed.

Although this was the only major confrontation between the Committee and the clubs in the period, the events surrounding the 'Pools War' can nevertheless be seen as clear evidence of the (usually latent) collective power of the clubs. More than any other

¹²⁵ *The Times*, 26, 27 February 1936.

¹²⁶ Inglis, *Soccer in the Dock*, p. 107.

¹²⁷ Inglis, *League Football*, p. 154.

factor, including the widespread press and public opposition¹²⁸, it was the orchestrated protest campaign of Masser and others which forced the Committee to backdown. Without the active support of the majority of its members - and regardless of the apparent backing for its policy given at the 20 February meeting - it became impractical for the executive to successfully take on the pools industry. As Catton's quotation at the beginning of the chapter indicates, the Committee was trusted in most instances to make an accurate assessment of the position of the majority of its member clubs and take the lead in initiating policy developments. Yet the events of February and March 1936 show that League clubs were far from taciturn and impotent when they felt their views were not being represented. Certainly, the assertion that the Management Committee effectively 'led' the Football League and its clubs needs to be qualified by a recognition of the checks and balances available to clubs through both the formal mechanisms of annual meetings and rule changes and the less formal, independent and impromptu action such as the anti-Committee movement of Masser and others.

5. Conclusion

It is not overstating matters to suggest that between 1900 and 1939 the Management Committee's role and influence *vis-à-vis* the League clubs was completely transformed. From a forum reflecting the collective opinion of its members, the Committee developed into an autonomous body with the primary role in the League's decision-making process. Standardisation and regulation may have circumscribed club policy and discouraged individual initiative but were also perceived as fundamental to the League's future prospects and economic viability. The dominant ideology of fair competition demanded the creation of a 'level playing field' and the executive's intervention in more and more areas previously regarded as the preserve of the individual club can be interpreted as part of this process.

Yet, as most contemporary observers realised, the 'level playing field' was never more than a myth. In the 1920s and 1930s particularly, the differentials in status, wealth

¹²⁸ See George Orwell's oft-quoted assessment of the public reaction in Yorkshire in his *The Road to Wigan Pier*, London, 1937. Also Fishwick, *English Football*, p. 129.

and public support between the top and bottom clubs increased and conceptions of the Management Committee's functions and duties polarised. In certain respects, the executive's relationship with the member clubs was constitutionally differentiated. Its responsibility for the administration and policy of the third division sections, together with their absence of full representation and voting rights, created a dependent relationship in which the Committee acted as protector or guardian of the clubs' interests. In the words of one journalist, the 'weaklings' had been 'carried on the back of the League mother' since they joined.¹²⁹ The wealthier clubs, however, did not need such consideration and support and the protective tendencies of the Committee were often interpreted by them as interference. This led, as we have seen, to a number of minor power struggles and flash points during the 1930s, through which the clubs sought to check Preston's unfettered authority to act on its members' behalf when major issues were concerned.

¹²⁹ *Athletic News*, 12 March 1928.

CHAPTER FIVE

PLAYERS AND EMPLOYMENT CONDITIONS

Many contemporary observers as well as historians have regarded the peculiar employment conditions within the Football League as somehow unique in British industrial relations. In particular, the twin pillars of the League system - the retain-and-transfer system and the maximum wage - have been seen as tantamount to a form of wage slavery by denying the player the basic freedom enjoyed by any other employee to leave his employment when he liked, and to sell his labour to the highest bidder. The secretary of the Players' Union remarked that 'the professional player is the slave of his club and they can do practically what they like with him'; and the historian Nicholas Fishwick has similarly described professional footballers between the wars as 'obedient servants'.¹ Yet this emphasis on player acquiescence and the master-servant relationship provides not only a rather distorted and partial picture of the complex ways in which the labour market operated up until the Second World War but also has the effect of isolating the experience of employees in the football industry from wider social developments. Hence, a dominant theme of this and the next chapter will be the trend towards what Savage and Miles have described as 'the bureaucratisation of the labour market' from the late Victorian era.² In the Football League this took the form of the gradual development of central regulation and formalised control over conditions relating to the employment, pay, movement, discipline, standards and welfare of players. The chapter will also recognise that relations between player and club were in fact cross-cut by a complex and often contradictory set of relationships involving the player, the Players' Union, the club, the FA and the Football League executive. This chapter will focus on three important areas of the employment of League footballers: the recruitment of players and their movement between clubs; contracts and transfer conditions; and the payment of professionals. It will explore the extent to which the opportunities of football employees were constrained by the artificially constructed labour market. How free were players to move where and when they wished and what say did they have in the conditions of their employment? In addition, we shall consider not only how much

¹ Green, *History of the FA*, p. 419; Fishwick, *English Football*, chapter 4.

² Mike Savage and Andrew Miles, *The Remaking of the British Working Class, 1840-1940*, London, 1994, pp. 48-56.

players were paid but also how this was determined. Did earnings differ substantially from player to player and club to club and how did this compare to rates of pay in comparable occupations?

1. Recruitment

Historians have all agreed on the difficulties of establishing precisely the number of players, both professional and amateur, involved in top level football. This has been complicated by a failure to distinguish between registered players - those who sign registration forms with the FA and League - and contracted players, who additionally sign agreements with their clubs. The Football League's own figures reveal that 502 players were registered with the twelve member clubs in 1891, and this total increased to 675 in the sixteen clubs in 1896. *Athletic News* listed 997 players registered to thirty-nine of the forty League clubs by 1911; and by 1925 at least 2,123 players were engaged by eighty-eight clubs in the League's four divisions. In 1938, the Players' Union reckoned that there were approximately 2,500 top-class professionals, most of whom were attached to Football League clubs; a higher figure of 3,000 was quoted in correspondence with the League and the Union in 1934.³ Squad sizes varied considerably over time and from club to club. Aston Villa considered that its staff of 30 professionals and 'a few good amateurs' was sufficient for the 1907/08 season, especially as the club was choosing not to run a third team.⁴ As Table 5.1 reveals, the average first division squad in 1911 consisted of nearly 29 part-time or full-time professionals whilst clubs in the second division employed just over 21. By the 1920s the leading clubs generally signed between 25 and 35 players in May of each year and often engaged an additional few before the season commenced in September.⁵ The Football League's own statistics reveal that during the 1930s a relatively successful club like Manchester City registered between 35 and 43 players each season (Table 5.3).

³ Vamplew, *Pay Up*, p. 207; Mason, *Association Football*, p. 89; *Athletic News*, 14, 28 August 1911 and 3, 10, 17, 24 August 1925; Minutes of AFPTU, 27 February 1939 (EGM); PFA, File 33, Watson Hartley to Jimmy Fay, 21 August 1934.

⁴ AV, 47/82, Ramsay to Mr. Harper, 4 May 1907.

⁵ Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 1933-39, *passim*; Minutes of West Ham United FC, 1923-39, *passim*.

In the lower divisions squads were markedly smaller, with clubs signing fewer full-time professionals and relying more on the services of part-time or even amateur players. Third Division Walsall employed a core of between 19 and 31 professional players each season during the 1930s but could also call on a large pool of local amateurs, mainly to man its second and third teams (Table 5.2). Durham City was probably less typical in having just nine professionals compared with twenty amateurs on its books in 1925, yet most third division clubs, and many in the higher divisions, regularly included a number of amateurs and part-timers, presumably as a means of keeping wage bills low.⁶ In 1923 the Management Committee had actually advised those northern section clubs in financial difficulties to reduce the number of professionals engaged.⁷ Thus it was not uncommon to find clubs in the north giving some players free transfers as a short term cost-cutting measure; Swindon Town similarly economised on its wage bill by £30 per week towards the end of the 1931/32 season by reducing the professional staff to just 17.⁸

Table 5.1 Average Squad Sizes in the Football League

	Division One	Division Two	Division (South)	Three	Division (North)	Three
1911	28.70	21.15	—	—	—	—
1925	30.05	26.77	22.36		21.41	

Source: *Athletic News*, 14, 28 August 1911; 3, 10, 17, 24 August 1925.

Table 5.2 Player Registrations at Walsall FC, 1932/33-1939/40

Season	Professional Registrations	Amateur Registrations	Amateurs signing Football League forms
1932/33	24	45	5
1933/34	21	33	8
1934/35	19	20	3
1935/36	28	25	10
1936/37	29	45	10
1937/38	27	62	13
1938/39	31	73	12
1939/40	24	14	11

Source: *Players Registration Book of Walsall FC, 1932-46*

⁶ *Athletic News*, 3 August 1925.
⁷ Minutes of Football League (Third Division Northern Section SGM), 21 March 1923.
⁸ *Daily Mirror*, 4 January 1936; *Daily Mail*, 7 April 1932.

Table 5.3 Player Registrations and Transfers at Manchester City FC, 1931/32-1939/40

Season	Registered Players	Transfers Out
1931/32	35	10
1932/33	35	9
1933/34	37	9
1934/35	39	11
1935/36	37	6
1936/37	41	10
1937/38	43	10
1938/39	40	4
1939/40*	36	1

* Up to 21 December 1939

Source: PFA, File 35, Statistics required from the Football League in the cases Corbett v. Inland Revenue and Dale v. Inland Revenue, 1939.

Yet official figures of *registered* players are misleading if one wishes to determine the numbers actively involved in League football on a regular basis. As Vamplew has pointed out, a large percentage of registered professionals - often over 40% each season before 1914 - never actually played a League match.⁹ This was partly the result of competition within clubs but can also be explained by the common practice of labour-hoarding. Many clubs technically retained players who had not received wages at all, or for some time, and had drifted towards a lower standard of football or even different employment entirely. Despite an attempt in 1899 by the Management Committee to introduce a six months' time-limit within which a club had to pay or play its registered professionals, clubs continued to hold large numbers of inactive players on their retained lists. In 1901 West Bromwich Albion reportedly held 120 retained players, of whom little more than 30 would have been legitimate club employees. In these circumstances, it is difficult to know exactly how many careers followed a path similar to that of Aston Villa's Knight. He had signed for Villa in 1905 and played in a single match for the junior team before spending five seasons in junior football. During this time Villa neither approached him nor offered him an engagement but he was nevertheless kept on the club's retained list and was hence theoretically still its player. Eventually, in 1911, a Southern League club offered Knight an engagement, and the League Management Committee decided to fine Villa £25 for not removing him from their retained list.¹⁰ The Management Committee

⁹ Vamplew, *Pay Up*, p. 207.

¹⁰ *Athletic News*, 4 March 1901, 9 October 1911; Minutes of Aston Villa FC, 10 October 1911.

obviously regarded statistical inaccuracy relating to League players as presenting administrative and practical problems, noting in a circular to clubs 'that many players who have long since finished football are still included in such [retain-and-transfer] lists'.¹¹

The recruitment of players by League clubs underwent significant changes in this period. The use of press advertising and football agents, both of which had been important means of finding players in the early days of League football, had clearly declined by the 1900s. Agents, in particular, were increasingly regarded with suspicion by club and League officials and the FA actually prohibited clubs engaging players through agents, although some, like the Football Players' Agency based in Birmingham and C. F. Caswell of Cardiff, undoubtedly continued to operate surreptitiously as middle men between player and club.¹² Advertisements in sporting papers did continue to be a popular recruitment strategy, especially for clubs in the lower divisions, though this was gradually overtaken by more sophisticated and reliable methods. Nevertheless, in the 1920s and 1930s successful first division clubs like Sheffield United still occasionally considered it beneficial to advertise in *Athletic News* for first class players.¹³ Advertising declined in importance as clubs began to develop their own scouting networks. Although hearsay and informal recommendations were perhaps still the most important ways of finding new players before 1914, many clubs were beginning to employ itinerant scouts on small fees to scour parts of the country for talent. In its first season in the League, for example, Oldham Athletic employed a local man 30s. weekly expenses to scout for players.¹⁴ Scouting networks became increasingly sophisticated in the inter-war period. By the early 1930s Sheffield United had developed an organised and co-ordinated scouting network covering Lancashire and Cheshire, Birmingham and District, Lincolnshire and the north-east. Each scout was paid £1 per week plus a 10s. allowance for lost time if required to watch mid-week matches. This was supplemented by the

¹¹ *Athletic News*, 8 May 1911.

¹² See Minutes of FA Consultative Committee, 22 November 1909; Minutes of FA Emergency Committee, 23 August-3 October 1921. On the activities of agents during the 1890s, see Mason, *Association Football*, pp. 92-94.

¹³ Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 13 April 1927, 10 June 1931.

¹⁴ Minutes of Oldham Athletic FC, 30 December 1907.

established practice of appointing a number of senior club professionals, including the famous ex-England international Ernest Needham, to 'look out for players', presumably at both local and national levels.¹⁵ Reports on players were sent to the board of directors for consideration and generally a director or the club's senior scout would be sent to watch the player again before any attempt was made to sign him. At West Ham United, all such scouting reports were systematically filed and recorded for future reference.¹⁶ Even for the less wealthy clubs it was increasingly necessary by the 1930s to organise a national scouting network enabling them to choose from the widest possible pool of talent. Thus newly-elected Ipswich Town immediately appointed four scouts to cover respectively the south of England, the midlands and the north, Manchester and Scotland.¹⁷

Few scouting networks were confined to England. The leading clubs certainly regarded international and Inter-League fixtures as a major recruiting opportunity but they also kept an eye on regular club games. Thus Aston Villa's representative at Linfield and Glentoran matches in March 1925 could inform his board of the presence of scouts from Burnley, Liverpool and Everton.¹⁸ The correspondence files of Villa's secretary George Ramsay also reveal that he kept in regular contact with the club's Scottish scout McIlroy ('Mac'), even gently censuring him for his poor rate of successful recommendations: 'When the Directors notice so many Scotch players coming this way they ask me when our turn is coming'.¹⁹ Other clubs looked even further afield. Huddersfield Town received occasional recommendations from a contact in Ontario, Canada and sometimes invited the suggested player over for a trial; Aston Villa, too, benefited from Canadian 'scouting'.²⁰

However, this does not mean that clubs neglected local players: on the contrary, local junior football remained the most fertile source of new talent for League clubs

¹⁵ Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 15 August 1934; 16 August 1922, 7 August 1923, 2 October 1928.

¹⁶ Minutes of West Ham United FC, 5 December 1932.

¹⁷ Minutes of Ipswich Town FC, 3 January and 5 September 1938.

¹⁸ Minutes of Aston Villa FC, 24 March 1925, 20 April 1926.

¹⁹ AV, 52/82, Ramsay to McIlroy, 19 August 1921, 1 February 1922.

²⁰ Minutes of Huddersfield Town FC, 13, 21 December 1938; Minutes of Aston Villa FC, 7 September 1920. But these 'scouts' were not part of any formalised network but simply former players or fans who thought they could do their old club a favour.

throughout this period. Former employees, directors, schoolteachers and even local journalists often acted as informal talent spotters and occasionally established personal contacts with League clubs.²¹ Villa sent its former player Jimmy Logan a cheque for £20 in 1927 'in appreciation of his past services' and instructed him 'to book any junior of the right build etc. he thinks good enough for us'.²² More importantly, prominent amateur clubs were often adopted formally as nurseries by their local professional counterparts. Such agreements, increasingly common by the early 1910s, enabled League clubs to test, and secure priority on, promising local players in return for financial subsidies. In addition, they would also sometimes use nursery clubs to farm out any promising but immature players of their own. Sheffield United, for example, agreed to pay grants of £20 and £50 in 1929 and 1930 respectively to the Norton Woodseats club on the condition that it could 'have first claim on any of their [the Woodseats'] players'.²³ West Ham United established similar agreements with Park Royal and Colchester; Blackburn Rovers did likewise with Victoria Cross; and Aston Villa had a long-standing association with Stourbridge.²⁴ No doubt these relationships could be exploitative: *Athletic News* accused Villa of occupying 'a position of dictatorship' with regard to its nursery clubs and, in particular, claiming 'little less than actual ownership' over Stourbridge.²⁵ Certainly, League clubs often regarded nursery club players as their own, even including them on their official retained lists. Yet, in general, such agreements were mutually beneficial, and continued to be sought by amateur clubs in financial difficulties.

Some clubs were particularly keen to assert the local character of their team and pursued regional recruitment more vigorously than others. The policy of Wolverhampton Wanderers directors only to sign players within a 50-mile radius may originally have been to reduce costs but came to represent a defining characteristic of the club before the First World War. The press similarly applauded West Bromwich

²¹ See Fishwick, *English Football*, pp. 6, 41-42.

²² Minutes of Aston Villa FC, 26 April 1927.

²³ Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 27 March and 15 May 1929, 26 and 1 April 1930.

²⁴ Minutes of West Ham United FC, 26 March 1935; *Athletic News*, 3 July 1911; Minutes of Aston Villa FC, 24 August 1911, 2 July 1912.

²⁵ *Athletic News*, 9 October 1911.

Albion for winning the 1919/20 championship with a squad composed entirely of Englishmen and with all but four members born within a dozen miles of the ground.²⁶ By the mid-1920s at least, however, predominantly local recruitment of this kind was increasingly recognised as an unobtainable ideal by the most successful League clubs. As Table 5.4 shows, in 1910 well over half of League players were born outside the region in which they played. The percentage had increased by 1925, although poorer clubs in the third division northern section made far greater use of local talent (Table 5.5).

Table 5.4 Geographical Recruitment of Football League Players, 1910.

Area of Origin	Division One		Division Two	
	No.	%	No.	%
Local (10-12 miles)	116	22.0	45	13.1
Within Region	122	23.1	85	24.8
Distant	289	54.8	213	62.1
Total Traced	527		343	

Source: Vamplew, Pay Up, p. 206, Table 13.2.

Table 5.5 Geographical Recruitment of Football League Players, 1925.

Area of Origin	Division One		Division Two		Division Three (S)		Division Three (N)	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Local (10-12 miles)	125	24.7	136	25.7	72	16.0	139	30.0
Within Region	69	13.6	80	15.1	56	12.4	124	26.8
Distant	312	61.7	313	59.2	323	71.6	200	43.2
Total Traced	506		529		451		463	

Source: Athletic News, 3, 10, 17, 24 August 1925.

This tendency to look further afield for new players can be partially explained by the growth, and increasing importance, of the transfer market. The anecdotal evidence suggests that the number of transfers and the amounts involved increased significantly over the period, and rose particularly sharply in the mid-1920s. By 1928 observers could refer to the 'transfer stampede' which took place immediately before the transfer deadline every March: that season it was reported that no fewer than 50 players moved in the last ten days permitted and that over £30,000 changed hands in deals involving 40 League clubs. Another correspondent categorised the 1920s as 'the age of transfers' in which long service to clubs was increasingly rare and where

²⁶ Matthews, *The Wolves*, pp. 18, 20; *Athletic News*, 5 April 1920.

players like the Cock brothers, Jack and Donald, could turn out for 12 different League clubs between them in less than nine seasons.²⁷ The available data, however, suggests little change in the total number of annual or seasonal transfers over the period. While the Football League recorded 195 players transferred in 1904, this had risen to 337 by 1910 and stayed at an average of 318 in the five seasons from 1931/32 to 1935/36.²⁸ At individual clubs like Manchester City in the 1930s as many as 10 or 11 players might move each season, representing up to 28 per cent of the professional staff, but more generally the figure rarely rose above 20 per cent (see Table 5.3).

Furthermore, by the 1920s more directors and managers began to adopt the policy of buying established players rather than training and developing their own. Clubs like Arsenal and Newcastle United were especially renowned for spending large transfer fees to help build winning sides. By 1924 Arsenal was not atypical amongst top division sides in paying over £5,000 a season on transfers and four years later was responsible for the first £10,000 fee when it bought Bolton Wanderers' David Jack. Newcastle expended £14,666 on transfer fees in 1925/26, including £6,500 on the Scottish international Hughie Gallacher.²⁹ Villa's secretary explicitly told one of the club's scouts that 'we want someone good and experienced enough to go into one of our teams, not to have to *make* them'.³⁰ And the pressure to buy players in order to achieve success on the field was not confined to the highest division. Philip Kelso, manager of second division Fulham, remarked in 1922 that his directors lacked the patience to allow youngsters to develop, preferring to resort to the transfer market.³¹ As Table 5.6 indicates, by 1939 first and second division clubs were spending seasonal averages of £6,545 and £3,682 on transfers and even those in the third division south were net buyers rather than sellers in the transfer market. But it must be remembered that poorer clubs, especially those in the third division north, continued to rely on the income derived from transfers to help alleviate financial difficulties.

²⁷ *Topical Times*, 24 March, 21 April 1928.

²⁸ Vamplew, *Pay Up*, p. 214, Table 13.5; PFA, File 35, Statistics required from the Football League in the case Corbett v. Inland Revenue and Dale v. Inland Revenue, 1939.

²⁹ Catton Folders, A-B, Arsenal FC Directors' Report 1924, p. 5; Wolverhampton Wanderers FC Programme, 25 February 1933.

³⁰ AV, 52/82, Ramsay to Jack Webster, 7 September 1921.

³¹ Catton Folders, E-F, Philip Kelso to Catton, 27 July 1922, p. 504.

Table 5.6 Football League Transfer Payments in 1939 (£)

	First Division	Second Division	Third Division (S)	Third Division (N)	Total
Paid Out	144,000	81,000	35,000	12,000	272,000
Average Per Club	6,545	3,682	1,591	545	
Received	55,000	26,000	20,000	22,000	123,000
Average Per Club	2,500	1,182	909	1,000	

Source: Calculated from data in 'The Football Industry - 1', p. 177.

All these factors contributed to the development of a large and highly regulated internal market for transfers within British football in general, and the Football League in particular, by the Second World War. The circulation of transfer lists, together with informal contacts between clubs, supplemented the work of scouts in this area. At the end of each season, the League secretary would circulate a list from each club indicating the names of players it was prepared to transfer. The fees required for these players were not included but could be obtained by any interested club on application to the League secretary and the club was then entitled to approach and sign any player on the list without the consent of the selling club. Disengaged players were also expected to take an active role in this process: like applicants at the recently established labour exchanges, they had to prove 'willingness to work' and 'genuine employability'.³² McKenna was adamant that players should not 'sit[ting] down and wait[ing] for clubs to come to them' and Sutcliffe noted that it was 'no business of the Management Committee... to find players jobs... The player must make an effort for himself'. What was more, the executive actually informed players that applications for reductions in transfer fees would not be considered before an effort had been made to find employment: 'They considered it was the duty of every player to try to find a place for himself'.³³ Thus many unemployed players continued throughout the period to write directly to club secretaries in the hope of being engaged or at least watched in a trial match.³⁴ Clubs also developed independent networks of contact and information regarding players. For instance, a club on the look out for a full-back or an outside-left would often inform other clubs of its requirements and ask

³² Geoffrey Finlayson, *Citizen, State, and Social Welfare in Britain, 1830-1990*, Oxford, 1994, p. 184.

³³ *Topical Times*, 2, 23 June 1923; Minutes of Football League, 8 June 1925 (AGM). Also see Minutes, 26 May 1923.

³⁴ See AV, 47/82, 52/82, *passim*.

for assistance: hence, in 1933 the West Ham United chairman reported receiving a letter from West Bromwich Albion suggesting one of the latter's inside-rights 'as a likely player for us'.³⁵ This type of co-operation, though hardly altruistic on either side, may well have saved money on scouting expenses and helped facilitate the recruitment and redistribution of players within the League.

It must be remembered, however, that there remained a vast reserve army of football labour throughout the period. The FA reported that there were about 5,000 registered professionals in 1939, half of whom were part-timers, and probably thousands of amateurs played at a high enough level to attract the interest of League scouts.³⁶ Yet, even taking into account places for professional players in other leagues, and the expansion of the League itself to 88 clubs by 1922, there were clearly always players unable to find work. Some probably drifted into other types of employment or to the junior leagues, but many simply regarded themselves as unemployed footballers and continued to search for work. Unemployment became a particular problem during the depression when declining attendances forced some clubs to reduce the size of their playing staffs. A further source of player recruitment which developed in this context was the Unemployment Bureau organised by the Players' Union from 1929, which acted as an intermediary between player and club. The Union had considered one of its roles from the beginning as that of an informal employment agency. The first set of rules from 1907 declared that a key objective was

To keep a list of all Members who are on the Transfer list, disengaged, or unsettled, with particulars of their positions on the field of play, their abilities, the clubs they have played for and any other necessary information with a view to obtaining suitable engagements for them.³⁷

The correspondence files of the first secretary Herbert Broomfield indicate that the Union did indeed send members' details to Football League, Southern League and Scottish League clubs in the hope of securing them an engagement.³⁸ Yet such action

³⁵ Minutes of West Ham United FC, 3 April 1933.

³⁶ Fishwick, *English Football*, p. 70.

³⁷ PFA, File 11, Rules of the Association Football Players' Union, 1907.

³⁸ See, for example, PFA, File 8, Broomfield to Dick Allman; Broomfield to F. C. Metcalf, both 1 July 1909.

remained a relatively minor part of the Union's activities and dependent upon the time and energy of the secretary himself. In contrast with these *ad hoc* arrangements, the Bureau was a more permanent and systematic venture. Although it initially operated on a fairly small scale, by 1934 the Bureau was distributing full lists and details of disengaged players to every League club and even to interested Irish and French clubs.³⁹ There are no details on the actual number of players assisted by the Bureau but both the Union and several club managers evidently regarded it as a 'a great success... in bringing clubs and players together'.⁴⁰

2. Contracts and Transfers

When joining a League club a player became subject to the authority not only of his club but also of the Football League itself and the Football Association. As well as signing his particular club agreement, he was required to register with both these bodies before being allowed to play competitively. Moreover, from 1912 the League ordered all agreements between clubs and players to include a clause making the player subject 'to the rules, regulations and bye-laws of the Football League, Football Association... and any other Association, League or Combination of which the club or Football League shall be a member'.⁴¹ Indeed, it was technically the League rather than the club who owned players' registrations. Hence when a club left the League for whatever reason, as Gainsborough Trinity did in 1912, the registration and transfer rights of its players automatically became vested in the Management Committee of the League.⁴²

In common with the majority of first-class cricket counties, League clubs were rarely prepared to offer contracts lasting over a year.⁴³ According to both Mason and Vamplew, the Management Committee actually forbade longer contracts in 1891 but this may have been merely an informal instruction as there is no trace of a rule to this

³⁹ Minutes of AFPTU, 20 August 1934 (AGM); Harding, *Good of the Game*, p. 178.

⁴⁰ Minutes of AFPTU, 26 August 1929 (AGM).

⁴¹ Football League Handbook, 1912/13, Rule 11.

⁴² See Minutes of Football League, 3 June 1912.

⁴³ Vamplew, *Pay Up*, p. 92; Tony Mason, 'Football' in Tony Mason (ed.), *Sport in Britain: A Social History*, Cambridge, 1989, p. 161.

effect.⁴⁴ The archival evidence indicates that a formal ruling on the matter may not have been necessary. Sheffield United gave George Utley a five-year engagement in 1913 but this was part of an exceptional offer to convince the Barnsley player to join United: the Board rejected a request by another player for a four-year contract a few months later and maintained a general policy that 'no player would be signed on for more than 12 months'. After briefly offering one of its senior professionals a two-year contract, local neighbours Sheffield Wednesday took a similar decision.⁴⁵ Billy Meredith noted at the same time that the Manchester clubs, Burnley, Aston Villa, Newcastle United, Sunderland and Blackburn Rovers had all signed agreements lasting over a year with certain players, despite pressure from Wednesday and other clubs to grant only annual contracts.⁴⁶ The Player's Union had indeed been arguing for some time that, in order to ensure greater job security, contracts should be extended to two years and beyond but the League considered it 'undesirable that players should be signed for extended periods' and in 1914 limited the contract period to less than two full playing seasons.⁴⁷ From 1922 the length of League agreements were explicitly tied to FA rules, which allowed for three specific time-scales: a trial period of four weeks; a full season or the remainder of a current playing season; or the last three months of a playing season together with the following season.⁴⁸ But club minute books suggest that the customary one-season contract remained pervasive in each of the League's four divisions.

While there was no standard FA or League contract, written agreements between clubs and players were relatively straightforward and rarely differed fundamentally from club to club. They generally stated the inclusive dates of the contract, the weekly wages to be paid and most included a clause requiring the player to follow training instructions, keep himself fit and serve the club to the best of his ability (see Appendices 9 & 10).⁴⁹ Some contracts went further by stipulating where the player

⁴⁴ Mason, *Association Football*, p. 104; Vamplew, *Pay Up*, p. 227.

⁴⁵ Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 17 November 1913, 29 April 1914; Vamplew, *Pay Up*, p. 227. On Utley's offer see Fishwick, *English Football*, p. 77.

⁴⁶ *Thomsen's Weekly News*, 28 June 1913.

⁴⁷ Minutes of AFPU, 15 December 1915 (AGM); Report of Football League AGM in *Athletic News*, 1 June 1914.

⁴⁸ See Minutes of FA Council, 30 January 1922.

⁴⁹ Sutcliffe *et al.*, *Football League*, p. 126.

could live or, increasingly by the 1920s and 1930s, precluding him from involvement in potentially dangerous pursuits such as motor-cycling or aviation. Aston Villa and Sheffield United were probably not the only clubs whose contracts prevented players residing in, being employed by, or indeed owning a public house. Individual contracts also sometimes included conditions relating to specific circumstances, such as the clause in Harris' 1924/25 agreement giving the Sheffield United Board immediate powers to cancel the agreement if the player failed to recover fully from a leg injury sustained the previous season.⁵⁰ Yet by this time contracts had become increasingly standardised throughout the League, as clubs were compelled by League rules to include sections relating to the termination of agreements - notably the 'palpable inefficiency' clause - as well as the payment of wages and benefits. Notwithstanding the legal and administrative significance of contracts, there is fragmentary evidence indicating that clubs continued to employ some players on a casual, non-contractual basis. Derby County was fined £2 by the FA in 1909 for entering into a verbal agreement with a player; the Players' Union were certainly aware three years later that 'certain players had no agreements with their clubs' although it is not clear whether this was regarded as simple negligence or a wilful contravention of League rules.⁵¹ The previous year, a League commission had reported on Middlesbrough's failure to properly complete and sign all of its player's agreements, seeing it as carelessness on the part of the club administration.⁵² Such carelessness may well have been eliminated by the increasing tendency of the Management Committee to arrange impromptu inspections of club records.

The breaking or termination of contracts was another element of the professional insecurity which many League players undoubtedly felt. Although the FA rules from 1894 theoretically protected players from dismissal during the playing season⁵³, the League developed a series of conditions to circumvent these and potentially handed clubs the power to cancel agreements at will. The most significant and contentious of these was the 'palpable inefficiency' clause, which was introduced by the

⁵⁰ Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 7 and 15 October 1924.

⁵¹ Minutes of FA Emergency Committee, 3 December 1908-13 January 1909; Minutes of AFPU, 9 August 1912 (AGM).

⁵² *Athletic News*, 5 June 1911.

⁵³ See Green, *Football Association*, p. 405.

Management Committee in April 1910. It allowed clubs to terminate any contract on fourteen days' notice 'where a player proves palpably inefficient or is guilty of serious misconduct or breach of disciplinary rules'.⁵⁴ As Fishwick has noted, this was potentially 'a catch-all clause that might mean anything from missing a penalty to losing a leg'; the Union representative and Newcastle half-back Colin Veitch opposed it as a one-sided arrangement which could lead to the dismissal of a player undergoing a temporary loss of form at the whim of his directorate.⁵⁵ In general, however, clubs used it as a means of ridding themselves of idle or troublesome employees. Any player given notice of dismissal was entitled to appeal to the Management Committee free of charge, and if unsuccessful, to a further appeal before the Appeals Committee on depositing £5. However, the appeals procedure was heavily weighted against the player. Whereas he was denied the right to legal representation, the club tended to support its case with a multitude of witnesses: Stockport County had its chairman, two directors, trainer, a referee and four other witnesses give evidence in one case.⁵⁶ In the vast majority of cases players preferred to accept dismissal reluctantly rather than engage in a lengthy and often futile appeal, during which time they were jobless and received no wages.

Nevertheless, as Table 5.7 shows, many of those who actually chose to fight were victorious. In 1913 a Barnsley player, Hunter, appealed successfully against the club's action in dismissing him on the grounds of his 'failure as a player'. After pointing to his exemplary character and conduct, emphasising that his playing history disproved the allegations and noting that he had received no prior complaint as to his play, Hunter's appeal was sustained by the Management Committee and the club ordered to pay costs.⁵⁷ Yet it is unclear what future prospects, if any, a player had in League football under these circumstances. A number of players whose appeals were upheld agreed to leave the club on a free transfer but even then the club's accusations are unlikely to have made it easy for them to obtain further engagements. In other cases the Management Committee encouraged the club and player to come to some mutual

⁵⁴ Minutes of AFPU, 26 April 1910; Football League Handbook, 1910/11, Rule 11.

⁵⁵ Fishwick, *English Football*, p. 87; *Thomsen's Weekly News*, 19 March 1910.

⁵⁶ Minutes of Football League, 15 November 1912.

⁵⁷ Minutes of Football League, 13 January 1913.

settlement whereby the latter would be de-registered in return for a lump sum payment.⁵⁸

Table 5.7 Player appeals to Management Committee against termination of contract for 'Palpable Inefficiency', 1912-32

Year	Appeal Sustained	Appeal Dismissed	Mutual Agreement	Total
1912*	0	2	1	3
1913	1	0	0	1
1920*	1	0	0	1
1921	1	1	0	2
1922	0	1	0	1
1923	2	0	0	2
1924	4	1	0	5
1925	5	0	0	5
1926	2	0	0	2
1927	0	2	0	2
1928	0	1	2	3
1929	0	0	1	1
1930	0	1	0	1
1931	0	0	1	1
1932	0	4	0	4

* From May

Source: Calculated from Minutes of Football League

The League introduced a further clause in 1915, allowing clubs to cancel agreements 'on any reasonable ground on four weeks' notice in writing being given to the player'.⁵⁹ Though it was justified as a temporary wartime measure which gave clubs the flexibility to dispense with labour if financial conditions deteriorated, the Players' Union attacked it as 'too drastic' and felt that 'this rule will give to clubs, by its vague wording, an opportunity to get out of their contracts should they be disposed to do so, and that it could open the door for unreasonable acts by clubs'.⁶⁰ The clause stayed on the rule books throughout the inter-war period and may have been used by clubs in financial difficulties to break contracts and thus reduce wage costs. The Ipswich Town board were probably more typical in utilizing the rule to clear out its unwanted players a couple of months before the end of each season, often with a lump sum payment in lieu of wages.⁶¹ There are also occasional references to such cases in the

⁵⁸ See Minutes of Football League, 9 November, 14 December 1925; 15 October 1928; 12 January 1931.

⁵⁹ Football League Handbook, 1915/16, Rule 11.

⁶⁰ Minutes of AFPU, 12 April 1915.

⁶¹ Minutes of Ipswich Town FC, 6 March and 1 May 1939.

Players' Union minutes⁶² but, on balance, it remained a less popular and controversial 'get-out' clause for clubs than 'palpable inefficiency'.

In addition, on two separate occasions, in 1914 and 1922, clubs were compelled by League rules to breach contracts already entered into with players. Both episodes involved the introduction of wage reduction schemes due to alleged financial difficulties among clubs and, on both occasions, the players were initially advised by their Union not to sign fresh agreements but eventually backed down.⁶³ However, in 1922 one player, aided by the Union, decided to 'contest the right of the club or the Football League to break his contract under the common law of the land'. The player, Chesterfield's Henry Leddy, had signed a contract in March 1922 which guaranteed him £9 a week until May 1923; a month after signing, his agreement was cancelled by Chesterfield and, on instruction from the Management Committee, a new one was offered with the reduced maximum wage terms of £8 in winter and £6 in summer.⁶⁴ Leddy refused the new contract and embarked on an arduous court case against the club which, after appeal, was decided in his favour. The League's intervention had been justified by reference to a section of League Rule 12 which empowered the Management Committee 'to cancel agreements with players which are contrary to the Rules of the League' and hence, in this case, to retrospectively change existing club contracts. At first glance, certainly, the judgement seemed to restrict the League's control over the making and breaking of contracts, even proving, according to the Union secretary Henry Newbould, 'that the Courts will not allow the breaking of players' agreements by either Clubs, Leagues or Associations'.⁶⁵ But while it is true that such comprehensive wage cuts were never attempted by the League again, the impact of the decision with respect to contracts was limited by the subsequent passage of a clause assuring that all player agreements be construed as if conforming automatically with League rules 'as amended or altered from time to time'.⁶⁶

⁶² For example, Minutes of AFPTU, 22 August 1927 (AGM).

⁶³ PFA, File 19, H. J. Newbould Circular to Club Representatives, 10 October 1914; Minutes of AFPU, 9 October and 2 November 1914; Minutes of AFPTU, 23 April and 7 May 1922 (both EGMs).

⁶⁴ Harding, *Good of the Game*, pp. 149-50; Minutes of Football League, 28 April 1922.

⁶⁵ Minutes of AFPTU, 20 August 1923 (AGM).

⁶⁶ Minutes of Football League, 28 May 1923 (AGM).

The breaking of contracts was not entirely one-sided: it was fairly common for agreements to be cancelled by mutual consent or even on the player's wishes. Amateurs or professional players on low wages were more likely to be freed in this manner as less money in wages and transfers had been invested in them. Thus, for example, West Ham United were prepared to release Murray less than five months into his contract during 1919, while Oldham Athletic did likewise with Jones in 1938.⁶⁷ Other players were compelled to buy themselves out of contract if they wished to stop playing football. This happened in October 1906 when McNaught paid his club, Sheffield United, £40 to release him from his contract so that he could return home and concentrate on his medical studies. United accepted this, on condition that if he wanted to play football again that season he had to pay the club a further £60 to cover the money it had already paid him in wages.⁶⁸ And in this situation, as with all broken contracts, the club still held registration and transfer rights over the player and was thus able to prevent him moving elsewhere to play top-level football.

If some players faced contractual difficulties with their clubs, a more significant problem surrounded the conditions governing the movement of labour and, in particular, the controversial retain-and-transfer system. Historians, along with many contemporary critics, have recognised that the system theoretically represented a basic and unique contravention of labour rights by denying the player the freedom to move where he wanted and to choose his own employer.⁶⁹ Even president John Bentley acknowledged the fundamental hardship in '[compelling] players to remain with particular clubs'.⁷⁰ As we have seen, all players were registered with the Football League and the FA and mobility of labour between clubs required the permission of both these bodies, as well as the consent of the player himself and the buying and selling club. But clubs could not be forced to transfer a player, which meant that the club with whom the player was registered possessed a monopoly over his services. When contracts expired in April and May of each year, clubs and players were

⁶⁷ Minutes of West Ham United FC, 15 September 1919; Minutes of Oldham Athletic FC, 12 January 1938.

⁶⁸ Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 2 October 1906.

⁶⁹ Peter J. Sloane, 'The Labour Market in Professional Football', *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 7, 1969, pp. 183-89; Mason, *Association Football*, pp. 104-06; Vamplew, *Pay Up*, pp. 126-28, 212-13; Korr, *West Ham United*, pp. 171-73.

⁷⁰ *Athletic News*, 10 June 1901.

involved in the complicated process of re-signing. In short, after internal board discussions, clubs forwarded to the League a list of players they intended to retain and a separate list of those 'open to transfer', the latter generally with a corresponding fee which buying clubs were expected pay. From the early 1890s, the League secretary began to circulate such lists to all its member clubs. Once the club's decision was made a player had very few alternatives and limited bargaining power. If a retained player wanted to leave he could reject the terms offered and apply to the Management Committee to consider his case, but this was often a long process which would mean losing several months' pay and, in any case, there was no guarantee that the appeal would be upheld. Indeed, as long as the player had been offered the FA's stipulated retaining wage, or what League rules referred to as 'reasonable wages', the decision was likely to go in the club's favour. Transfer-listed players could similarly find themselves entrapped by the system, especially when unrealistically high prices were placed on their heads. They too were entitled to appeal to the Management Committee to have the fee reduced, but even if successful there was no assurance that another club would be prepared to pay the fee.

In practice, the operation of the system could often depend on how flexible the League and the clubs were in their interpretation of the rules. Particularly infuriating to some players was the widespread practice amongst clubs of retaining players on terms unchanged or even reduced from the previous season. The problem became increasingly acute from the early 1920s, as the maximum wage rose without a corresponding increase in the retaining wage. Indeed, while the maximum wage stood at £8 a week from 1922, pressure from the League, especially the third divisions clubs, led to a reduction in 1923 of the retaining fee from £260 a year (£5 per week) to £200.⁷¹ The Players' Union mounted a particularly bitter campaign during the late 1920s and 1930s against what it regarded as 'the harsh and unfair treatment' experienced by many of its members as a result of this rule.⁷² It claimed that clubs were able to retain long-serving players while drastically cutting their wages. Goalkeeper Tommy Allen, for instance, had been employed by Southampton on the

⁷¹ Minutes of Football League (Third Division Southern and Northern Sections SGMs), 21, 26 March, 1923.

⁷² Minutes of AFPTU, 25 August 1930 (AGM).

maximum wage for five years - playing in 192 of the 208 League matches between 1920 and 1925 - before the club reduced his terms to the retaining wage. He refused to re-sign and the club stopped his wages and reported him to the FA, leaving him 'debarred from earning his livelihood' until the case was settled.⁷³ The FA was pressurised into loosening the rule in 1934, but this did not change the fact that many cases still depended on what the FA believed constituted a 'reasonable wage'.⁷⁴ Indeed, the issue was complicated by the League's decision in 1922 to alter its long-standing definition of a 'reasonable wage' as either the maximum wage or the player's previous wage and thereby allow poorer League clubs to legitimately retain players on reduced terms. As Jimmy Fay, the Union secretary, pointed out in a letter to his League counterpart in 1938, the 'reasonable wage' rule allowed League clubs to 'absolutely ignore' the FA retaining wage.⁷⁵

High transfer fees, too, could represent a major obstacle to the free movement of labour. The number of players appealing for reductions in transfer fees - approaching 300 annually by 1910⁷⁶ - indicated the scale of the problem, as did the Management Committee's recognition in 1911 that 'in many instances fees are fixed that the clubs can never hope to realise'.⁷⁷ The Players' Union believed the situation was so bad between the wars that some players were being prevented from earning a living and were even forced 'to go out of League Football, or to leave the country'.⁷⁸ Cases like those of Sheffield United's Gough lend support to this view. Gough, an ageing ex-England international, was suspended during August 1924 for breaking his contract with United by taking a public house and was subsequently put on sale for a price of £2,000. Although the fee was certainly too high for a player of Gough's age, and despite the fact that United no longer wished to employ him, the club refused for over a year to reduce the price and thus in effect temporarily halted his career. Eventually he was sold in October 1926 - over two years after the cancellation of his contract - to

⁷³ Minutes of AFPTU, 28 September 1925; G. Chalk and D. Holley, *The Saints: A Complete Record, 1885-1987*, Derby, 1987, pp. 65-73, 261.

⁷⁴ Minutes of AFPTU, 20 August 1934 (AGM).

⁷⁵ Minutes of International Football League Board, 18 March 1922; PFA, File 35, Fay to Fred Howarth, 21 January 1938.

⁷⁶ Vamplew, *Pay Up*, p. 214 (Table 13.5).

⁷⁷ *Athletic News*, 8 May 1911.

⁷⁸ Minutes of AFPTU, 21 August 1933 (AGM).

Preston North End for a nominal fee of just £500.⁷⁹ Gough was more fortunate than other players whose careers were ended for good. For example, Taylor had been placed on Liverpool's transfer list in May 1937 but, with no prospect of being signed until the beginning of the 1938/39 season, he turned his back on football and applied successfully to the Union for a small loan to help him in a drapery business he had acquired.⁸⁰ In fact, for the old or less talented player, a transfer fee of any kind made finding another engagement particularly difficult. Hence during the early 1930s, when a number of clubs were experiencing financial difficulties, the Player's Union appealed to clubs publicly at signing-on time to give free transfers to players they did not want to retain, and implored the Management Committee to reduce or remove all fees.⁸¹

Yet the rhetoric of 'slavery' which permeated contemporary criticism of the retain-and-transfer system, especially that of the Union, has probably led historians to overemphasise the oppressive elements of the system and neglect examples of its practical operation. Gough's case shows that clubs could be obstructive towards players who had broken the rules but, in general, they did not stand in the way of those who were determined to move. It was widely recognised that players were valuable assets and that it was in the club's interests to reach agreed terms or to move the player on as quickly and as profitably as possible. Nobody wanted a discontented player at their club. West Ham United informed one of its transfer-listed players that 'anything possible would be done toward helping him to get a job' and in many instances clubs were prepared to voluntarily reduce the original fee, especially if another club had shown an interest in the player.⁸² The Union's propaganda concerning free transfers also seems to have had some effect: Sheffield United gave nine of its playing staff free transfers in 1934 and Oldham Athletic similarly released seven in 1938.⁸³ Moreover, if negotiations with the club were unsuccessful, the Management Committee could step in to help the player. Official figures show that

⁷⁹ Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 13 August, 4, 12 November 1924; 19 August, 3 November 1925; 13 October 1926.

⁸⁰ Minutes of AFPTU, 16 May 1938.

⁸¹ Minutes of AFPTU, 20 April 1931, 8 August 1932, 24 April 1933.

⁸² Minutes of West Ham United FC, 25 April 1933.

⁸³ Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 1 May 1934; Minutes of Oldham Athletic FC, 4 May 1938.

the majority of cases before the Committee led to reductions in transfer fees favouring the player and, in addition, League representatives worked on an informal basis to iron out disputes. Thus in 1913 the League president successfully intervened by requesting Sheffield United to grant Wilkinson a free transfer 'in consideration of his length of service with the club'.⁸⁴ If the official mechanisms failed it was still sometimes possible for a player to persuade or coerce the board to let him leave. It was not unusual for clubs to accede immediately to transfer requests precipitated by a player's demotion to the second team, or his being generally 'unsettled', although it could take months for a satisfactory move to be negotiated.⁸⁵ And as we shall see in the next chapter, clubs rejecting transfer requests were occasionally faced with absenteeism, non-cooperation or other forms of disruptive behaviour.

Most analyses of professional football have emphasised the unique nature of the employment restrictions embodied in the retain-and-transfer system. The usual comparison here is with industries such as coal-mining, building, textiles and other occupations traditionally associated with the employment of industrial workers where, regardless of the inherent hardships and dangers, employees were always theoretically free to move between jobs and employers as they pleased. This parallel is hardly surprising given the socio-economic and occupational background of the majority of professional footballers and directors and the apparent duplication of employer-employee relations from the factory to the football club.⁸⁶ Yet as a result, comparisons with the employment conditions in more closely-related areas, particularly other sports and sectors of the entertainment industry, have been rather neglected. While it is true that no other industry exhibited such tight and strictly regulated restrictions on an employee's freedom of contract, there were clearly some comparable practices. There is some evidence that rugby league clubs were able to prevent their players moving on, although they had no retaining rights similar to those in the Football League. Players wishing to change allegiance in county cricket were

⁸⁴ Vamplew, *Pay Up*, pp. 214 (Table 13.5), 241; Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 21 May 1913.

⁸⁵ See Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 3 October 1911; 15 January 1931; 25 February 1931; Minutes of Aston Villa FC, 3 October 1911.

⁸⁶ Korr, *West Ham United*, p. 171, makes a similar point. Also see Tony Mason, 'Stanley Matthews', *EUI Colloquium Papers*, Florence, 1989, pp. 1-18.

also probably deterred by the qualification rule, which required players to have two years residence in their new county.⁸⁷ Looking beyond sport, Lois Rutherford has indicated how music-hall proprietors attempted to assert ownership over 'their' performers by barring them from performing at rival establishments within a certain area and for specified periods both before and after each engagement. Although these restrictions were generally compensated for by higher salaries and increased job security, it still meant that all but the few star artistes were denied genuine freedom of contract.⁸⁸ Moreover, it is worth noting the similarity of language used by critics of the barring system in the music hall and the retain-and-transfer system in League football. One variety artiste's suggestion during the music hall strike of 1907, that his fellow professionals were treated like a 'chattel and a machine that can be turned on and off, ordered here or there according to the fancy of the managers', was clearly echoed by the Union's description of the professional footballer as 'a bonded man' and a 'tool' or 'puppet' in the hands of the clubs, League and FA.⁸⁹

3. Wages and Remuneration

Studies of the remuneration of League footballers have tended to suffer from a paucity of systematic data which, consequently, has meant that conclusions have been partial and largely impressionistic. In view of this, it is perhaps surprising that football club archives have been largely neglected in research and that no effort has been made to compare the evidence on player's earnings by drawing on the experience of a range of clubs. Hence this section of the chapter is partly based on data from a number of club minute books, wage books and ledgers - some previously unused by historians - and attempts to show the way in which earnings became increasingly regulated and determined centrally from Preston.

⁸⁷ Vamplew, *Pay Up*, pp. 148, 211-12; Ric Sissons, *The Players: A Social History of the Professional Cricketer*, Sydney, 1988, pp. 85-89.

⁸⁸ Rutherford, 'Managers in a small way', pp. 105, 110.

⁸⁹ Quoted in Rutherford, 'Managers in a small way', p. 94. On the Union's language of slavery see Broomfield's correspondence during the 1909 dispute in PFA, Files 6, 7 and 8. Also Syd Owen's comments in *Athletic News*, 8 May 1911 and Braham Dabscheck, 'Defensive Manchester'; also 'Man or a Puppet?', pp. 221-38.

The absence of hard evidence is less surprising for the period before the introduction of the maximum wage in 1901, when wages, bonuses and other payments were not regulated at all by the League or the FA but determined by each club individually and could therefore vary substantially over time and from club to club. The evidence which exists suggests that by the turn of the century the best players were receiving as much as £5 per week, excluding bonuses, while regular second teamers could be guaranteed as little as 10s. to £1, with possible increases if picked for the first eleven.⁹⁰ Income undoubtedly varied considerably and it is clear that few could expect the £7 weekly wage throughout the year which Beats and Baddeley of Wolverhampton Wanderers were reputed to receive.⁹¹ In addition, most players would have received a smaller wage over the 15 or so weeks of the close season and some were probably not paid at all in the summer. The passing of the maximum wage rule has been seen in this context as a significant turning point, heralding a general standardisation and equalisation of wages across the League. The wage books of Sheffield United for the early 1900s (Table 5.8) certainly seem to support the claim made by Aston Villa's chairman, Fred Rinder, that the maximum wage soon became a standard wage for the top professionals.⁹² Only five of United's players were guaranteed over £4 per week in 1899/1900, whereas by the second season of the operation of the wage limit, in 1902/03, fourteen were receiving the maximum. Other clubs may not have been able financially to offer the maximum to so many of their leading players: the Stoke secretary revealed that only three players at his club were given the maximum in 1906 while Blackpool had nobody on £4.⁹³ And Table 5.8 also shows that the maximum wage did little to substantially alter the wage differentials within a club as, at Sheffield United at least, the maximum seems to have been restricted to the first team. Nevertheless, according to the FA's figures, by 1910 573 Football League and Southern League players were receiving the maximum, suggesting that, at a modest estimation, a third of all registered League players (there were approximately 1,000 at this time) were on £4 per week.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ See Mason, *Association Football*, pp. 96-98.

⁹¹ Matthews, *The Wolves*, p. 18. Liverpool, first division champions in 1900/01, were also paying some of their players £7, which with bonuses could reach £10 per week. *Athletic News*, 27 May 1901.

⁹² Report of FA AGM in *Athletic News*, 4 June 1906.

⁹³ Comment by H. D. Austerberry from Report of FA AGM in *Athletic News*, 4 June 1906; J. Rawcliffe, 'Blackpool Football Club: From Lancashire League to Second Division' in *Book of Football*, p. 176.

⁹⁴ FA Circular on Financial Arrangements Between Clubs and Players, 10 January 1910.

The idea that the maximum wage had an overall equalising effect on wages is rather simplistic as it ignores the extent to which gradation and hierarchy were built into the legislation, particularly in the inter-war years. From 1910 it was agreed that clubs could pay players an extra 10s. per week above the maximum after two years service and a further 10s. after four years, giving elite players a potential new wage of £5 per week (£260 a year). Although it is difficult to know exactly how many players benefited from this, minute books suggest that most clubs took advantage of the rule, thus stretching the wage gap slightly and establishing a distinct hierarchy within clubs based on continuity of service as well as talent.⁹⁵ In 1920 the wage structure was further reformed, partly as a result of pressure from the Players' Union to increase wages 'to cover the extra cost of living' and allow annual wage rises 'according to merit'.⁹⁶ Wages were henceforth to be regulated according to a sliding scale, ranging from a maximum of £5 per week for new players with annual rises of £1 weekly over four years to a final ceiling of £9 per week. Moreover, all payments were now based on a 52-week period rather than the previous 39 weeks, which amounted to a possible maximum of £468 a year.⁹⁷ The emphasis on payment by length of service ahead of merit, however, caused considerable discontent among certain players. According to the Union the sliding scale was unpopular: 'We know that is the opinion held by players in the North and Midlands. It is frequently pointed out to us by our members that while men in first teams are receiving £6, others in the second teams are in receipt of £7 to £9'.⁹⁸ Two years later the maximum was reduced to £8 during the 37-week playing season and £6 in the remaining 15 weeks of the close season. The sliding scale was retained but clubs were additionally permitted to increase the wages of players picked for the first team and, likewise, reduce those of players dropped through loss of form.⁹⁹ Hence merit was now recognised alongside seniority as an essential element of wage determination.

⁹⁵ Minutes of Football League, 23 October, 15 November 1912; Minutes of Aston Villa FC, 9 April 1912; Minutes of Sheffield United FC, 1 October 1912. The resolution did not come into operation until 1912 and was not officially adopted as a League rule until 1914.

⁹⁶ Minutes of AFPTU, 23 February 1920.

⁹⁷ Sutcliffe, *et al.*, *Football League*, p. 123.

⁹⁸ Minutes of AFPTU, Letter from H. J. Newbould to J. McKenna, 2 March 1921.

⁹⁹ Sutcliffe, *et al.*, *Football League*, p. 124.

Table 5.8 Basic Winter Wages of Sheffield United Players, 1899/1900-1904/05

Weekly Wage (£ s. d.)	1899/1900	1900/01	1901/02	1902/03	1903/04	1904/05
4.10.0	1	2				
4. 0.0	4	8	13	14	12	12
3.10.0			1			
3. 5.0			1			
3. 0.0	4	4	4	4	6	4
2.15.0	2	1				
2.10.0	5	1	1			3
2. 5.0	2		1			
2. 0.0	3	2		3	2	5
1.15.0	1			2	1	2
1.10.0		1	1	1	2	
1. 5.0	1		3	1	3	
1. 0.0	2	3	5	5	4	4
15.0	4	5	1	3	1	
12.6		1		1		
10.0	1					

Source: Wage Books of Sheffield United FC.

The sliding scale gave clubs a certain amount of freedom to alter a player's weekly wage subject to the terms of his contract and the sanction of the Management Committee. In particular, it was increasingly used as an incentive for players to reach the first team and thus intensify competition within the club. This could be done, firstly, by applying directly to increase the wages of a reserve player regularly making the first team, although the Management Committee would refuse such requests unless the player had enjoyed a lengthy run - normally at least ten matches - at the higher level.¹⁰⁰ Alternatively, wages could be altered on a weekly basis according to which team the player was picked for. Aston Villa, for one, decided in 1921 to pay all players receiving less than the maximum an extra £1 per week if they made the first team. Sheffield United adopted a more comprehensive incentive scheme during the 1930s, often guaranteeing its best players a weekly wage of just £6, with £2 extra providing they kept their first team place.¹⁰¹ At many clubs the maximum wage therefore remained effectively a first team wage, a policy made explicit by the West

¹⁰⁰ For example, see Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 31 October 1934.

¹⁰¹ Minutes of Aston Villa FC, 13 September 1921; Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 28 April 1937, 3 May 1938. West Ham United, Ipswich Town, Walsall and Oldham Athletic all developed variations of the same basic wage structure during the 1930s.

Ham board in 1927.¹⁰² Not surprisingly, many players objected to this as it increased the pressure to perform consistently each week while denying them a constant and secure wage. *Topical Times* believed that the weekly sliding scale actually created 'a feeling of unsettlement which... upset a team's spirit and efficiency' but this did not prevent its general adoption across the League by the mid-1930s.¹⁰³

Thus even at the more wealthy and successful League clubs the maximum wage was reached only by a minority, although the precise size of this minority is difficult to gauge. According to the Players' Union, fewer than 10 per cent of professionals were on the maximum by 1939 although the figure may have been higher at more prosperous times, especially the immediate post-war years. Sheffield United, for example, signed 11 of its 18-man squad at the £9 maximum for the 1921/22 season but by 1934 this figure had dropped to four.¹⁰⁴ At many second and third division clubs the maximum was probably unattainable even for the top players. The highest possible weekly wage at Ipswich Town during their first season in the third division south was £7, while Ratcliffe, captain of Oldham Athletic in the northern section, was heading his club's scale in the late 1930s at just £4.10s. winter and £4 summer wages with an extra £1 in the first team.¹⁰⁵

Below the top earners at each club were a range of veteran, reserve and youth players moving up or down the scale depending on circumstances. As Tables 5.9, 5.10 and 5.11 indicate, basic wage differentials were still considerable both within and between League clubs in the inter-war period, although the wage range within a club like West Ham was noticeably smaller by the 1930s than it had been at the beginning of the 1920s. At the bottom end of the wage scale many professionals undoubtedly struggled to make a living, especially in the lower divisions where unemployment and the absence of summer wages caused persistent problems. Indeed, while wages were limited at the top of the scale there was no corresponding stipulated minimum to

¹⁰² Minutes of West Ham United FC, 19 April 1927.

¹⁰³ *Topical Times*, 10 April 1926; Minutes of AFPTU, 23 August 1937 (AGM); Seed, *Jimmy Seed Story*, p. 84; Jimmy Guthrie, *Soccer Rebel: The Evolution of the Professional Footballer*, Pinner, 1976, p.32.

¹⁰⁴ Minutes of AFPTU, 27 February 1939 (EGM); Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 3 May 1921, 1 May 1934.

¹⁰⁵ Wage Books of Ipswich Town FC; Minutes of Oldham Athletic FC, 12 April 1939.

which League clubs were expected to comply. Sheffield United's lowest terms were offered to part-time nursery or 'A' team players who received £1 per week with increases of £1 if picked for the reserve or first teams. At Sunderland in 1908 wages of £1-£2 per week were received by players employed in other occupations throughout the week but this had risen to £3-4 when Raich Carter joined the club in 1931 as a part-time footballer and electrical engineering apprentice.¹⁰⁶ Young players were also often engaged on the groundstaff for minimal wages until they were able to sign professional forms at seventeen: future manager Ted Fenton was the first to be given such a post at West Ham in 1930, although the practice was to become commonplace.¹⁰⁷ Problems of low pay increased with the onset of the depression and the need of many clubs to economise by reducing wage bills. This often manifested itself in the stoppage of summer wages through releasing players in May and re-engaging them in August in time for the new season. Third division Swindon, for instance, released almost three-quarters of its squad for this reason during the summer of 1931.¹⁰⁸ Moreover, in certain districts footballers were categorised as 'seasonal workers' and denied unemployment benefit, although the independent Umpire eventually decided in favour of the player in 1932 after considerable Union agitation at government level.¹⁰⁹ Nevertheless, problems of low pay continued throughout the mid-1930s: in fact, the majority of third division north players were allegedly on such low wages by 1936 that they could not even afford the small Union subscription fee.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 9 September 1931, 1 March 1933; PFA, File 6, F. Means to Broomfield, 25 October 1908; Raich Carter, *Footballer's Progress*, London, 1950, pp. 36, 39.

¹⁰⁷ Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 31 March, 1 June and 5 August 1937; Minutes of West Ham United FC, 25 March 1930. On Fenton, see Korr, *West Ham United*, pp. 98-100.

¹⁰⁸ Wolverhampton Wanderers Programme, 14 April 1933; Fishwick, *English Football*, p. 78.

¹⁰⁹ Minutes of AFPTU, 8 and 22 August 1932 (AGM).

¹¹⁰ Minutes of AFPTU, 24 August 1936 (AGM).

Table 5.9 Basic Winter Wages of West Ham United Players

Weekly Wage (£ s. d.)	1920/21	1924/25	1929/30	1934/35
9. 0.0	6			
8. 0.0		8	3	
7.10.0	1			
7. 0.0	4	3	8	2
6.10.0		4		1
6. 0.0	6	4	4	7
5.10.0	1	1	1	
5. 0.0	8	6	5	13
4.10.0	1			1
4. 0.0	2	2		

Source: Minute Books of West Ham United FC.

Table 5.10 Summer Wages of West Ham United Players

Weekly Wage (£. s. d.)	1920/21	1924/25	1929/30	1934/35
9. 0.0	6			
7. 0.0	4			
6.10.0	1			
6. 0.0	4	13	12	6
5.10.0		6	1	
5. 0.0	10	4	5	7
4.10.0		1	1	2
4. 0.0	1	2	2	7
3.10.0	1			2
3. 0.0		2		
2. 0.0	1			

Source: Minute Books of West Ham United FC.

Table 5.11 Basic Winter Wages of Football League Players.

	Sheffield United Second Division 1938/39	Ipswich Town Third Division South 1938/39*	Oldham Athletic Third Division North 1939/40
Weekly Wage (£. s. d.)			
8. 0.0.			
7. 0.0.		1	
6. 0.0.	15	7	
5.10.0.	1		
5. 0.0.	6	13	
4.10.0.		3	10
4. 0.0.	5	1	2
3.10.0.			1
3. 5.0.		1	1
3. 0.0.	2	2	
2. 0.0.			1
1.15.0.		1	
1. 5.0.		1	

* Week ending 1 October 1938.

Sources: Minute Books of Sheffield United Football Committee, Wage Books of Ipswich Town FC, Minute Books of Oldham Athletic FC.

While the weekly wage remained the basic form of remuneration for all League players in this period it was increasingly augmented by a number of other possible financial rewards. The most important of these was probably the benefit, a practice borrowed most directly from county cricket but also with a long history in the theatre, music hall and other sectors of the entertainment industry.¹¹¹ From 1901 the FA permitted clubs to grant a benefit match at the end of a player's career or after five years' continuous service and subsequently allowed a second benefit after ten years. Initially special friendlies were organised for this purpose but increasingly players began to receive partial or entire proceeds of League matches: a policy which Sheffield United had adopted as early as 1905.¹¹² In addition, directors tended to guarantee minimum sums, a practice which guarded footballers from the risks associated with benefits in the theatre, music hall and county cricket, where vast expenses or poor attendances could seriously affect the amount raised.¹¹³ From about

¹¹¹ Sissons, *The Players*, pp. 129-40; Vamplew, *Pay Up*, pp. 221-22; Keith A. P. Sandiford, 'The Birth of the Professional Cricketer's Benefit Match', *IJHS*, 8, 1, 1991, pp. 111-23; Michael Baker, *The Rise of the Victorian Actor*, London, 1978, pp. 122-23; Bailey, 'Community of Friends', pp. 41-47. Also see Bailey, 'Custom, Capital and Culture', pp. 191-93.

¹¹² Minutes of FA Consultative Committee, 17 December 1900; *Athletic News*, 11 September 1911; Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 8, 30 August 1905.

¹¹³ See Baker, *Victorian Actor*, p. 123; Bailey, 'Community of Friends', p. 44; Sandiford, 'Professional Cricketer's Benefit Match', pp. 113, 121.

1920 most clubs dispensed altogether with the practice of allocating matches and instead guaranteed each player a fixed sum. In fact, although the benefit was initially regarded as a gift from club to player rather than a contractual right, it had developed by the 1920s into an essential aspect of the bargaining process between the two and represented the main supplement to the player's basic earnings. In this sense football benefits differed fundamentally from their cricket counterpart and were treated as such by the Commissioners of Inland revenue who taxed the former but not the latter. The High Court judged in 1923, and then again in 1941, that as benefits were specifically provided for by Football League regulations they should be regarded as a payment for a players' services just like his wage, bonus and talent money.¹¹⁴ Thus when rumours began circulating in 1934 that Wolverhampton Wanderers was withholding benefits from its players, the board inserted a notice in the club programme assuring spectators that 'benefits have been paid immediately they were due... and the Directors will follow the same principle in the future'.¹¹⁵ Clubs were not compelled to grant benefits but they were likely to have a dissatisfied workforce if they refused.

The actual sum received via the benefit could depend on the status of the player as well as the financial position of the club. The archival evidence suggests that the average pre-First World War benefit at Sheffield United and Wednesday raised somewhere between £100-£300, while wealthier Aston Villa was able to grant sums of £300-£450 in 1912 and even paid £500 to its England inside-left Joe Bache.¹¹⁶ Charles Sutcliffe testified that £200 was a typical figure but added that some players were able to get £500 and, in exceptional cases, £1,000.¹¹⁷ In 1920 Sheffield United did allow club captain Utley to receive a benefit of nearly £1,100 through the proceeds of a chosen League match, though this precipitated a collective response from other squad members who complained of 'preferential treatment' and the board subsequently set the standard benefit at £500 for first teamers.¹¹⁸ After 1920 the League Management Committee itself limited benefit payments to £500 (increased to

¹¹⁴ Maurice Golesworthy, *The Encyclopaedia of Association Football*, London, 1957, pp. 25-26; *Athletic News*, 30 May 1927.

¹¹⁵ Wolverhampton Wanderers Programme, 3 March 1934.

¹¹⁶ Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 1905-14, *passim*; Minutes of Aston Villa FC, 23 January, 16 April 1912.

¹¹⁷ *Athletic News*, 22 March 1909, 11 September 1911.

¹¹⁸ Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 11, 25 February, 2 March 1920.

£650 in 1924) for regular first team players with a proportionately smaller sum for other players. Thus while Sheffield United paid Birks the usual £500 in 1930, a reserve like Stevenson could only expect £350.¹¹⁹ Like wages, some benefit payments were also linked to individual or collective performance. Examples include West Ham giving Hodgson and Moore a definite £300 benefit each, to be increased to £400 if the majority of their appearances in that season were for the first team; and the same club offering Collins £350 'which could be increased at our discretion if his play and our financial and league position warranted such' or a guaranteed £400.¹²⁰ There is no doubt that some players increased their earnings substantially through the benefit system. West Ham's Jimmy Ruffell received four benefits of £650, £500 twice and £200 in the course of his eighteen years playing with the club, which effectively added £100 to his annual wage.¹²¹ However, clubs in financial difficulties were often forced to delay or suspend non-obligatory payments such as benefits. In 1921 the Stockport County directors issued a public appeal to enable them to raise the £3,000 owed in benefit monies to their players.¹²² Sheffield United's decision to suspend benefits from 1933 to 1936 'until finances of the Club have improved'¹²³ was probably not exceptional; and it was also common for clubs in temporary financial difficulties to postpone benefits until the following season. Nevertheless, we can see from Table 5.12 that by the 1930s a significant proportion of League players were granted benefits each season and most of these received £400 and above.

Table 5.12 Benefit Payments to League Players, 1931/32-1935/36

Year	Under £100	£100-200	£200-300	£300-400	£400-500	£500-650	Total
1931/32	—	15	13	7	3	29	67
1932/33	—	10	11	11	10	30	72
1933/34	3	9	10	12	22	45	101
1934/35	—	1	16	15	10	32	74
1935/36	—	7	11	7	14	38	77
Total	3	42	61	52	59	174	391

Source: PFA, File 35, Statistics required from Football League on cases *Corbett v. Inland Revenue* and *Dale v. Inland Revenue*, 1939.

¹¹⁹ Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 1 April 1930.

¹²⁰ Minutes of West Ham United FC, 19 April 1927, 2 May 1933.

¹²¹ Minutes of West Ham United FC, 13 April 1926, 15 May 1933; Korr, *West Ham United*, p. 184.

¹²² Minutes of AFPTU, 26 September 1921 (AGM).

¹²³ Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 22 February 1933.

Theoretically the benefit was a reward for loyal service or ‘a sign of the bond between [the player] and the club’¹²⁴ but in practice it often became a source of conflict between the two. One such case was the dispute between Christopher Buckley and Aston Villa in 1911. Like many other players, Buckley signed an agreement entitling him to the proceeds of a League match with a minimum guarantee of £450. Subsequently, according to Buckley, the Villa secretary promised him the match against FA Cup holders Bradford City; the board repudiated this and instead offered him the choice of the Liverpool, Preston or Sheffield United games - all less attractive ties with early kick-offs. After meeting with the board Buckley decided that ‘if he could not have the Bradford match he would have none at all’ and refused to play in the next League match. He was then suspended *sine die* ‘until such time as he expresses regret for his action’.¹²⁵ In Buckley’s view the club had acted in a parsimonious manner by restricting his potential benefit income: indeed, ‘It was common talk among the Villa players... that nobody got a benefit from the club without a row, and then the player only got what they cared to give him’.¹²⁶ Yet ultimately there was little Buckley could do: three weeks later he eventually backed down, apologised for his action and accepted the Sheffield United match.¹²⁷ Even though clubs increasingly accepted the benefit as a fundamental player’s right, there could still be conflict over the amount given. West Ham, for instance, refused Vic Watson’s request for a maximum £650 benefit just a few weeks after publicly congratulating him on his performance in an international match and he later accepted the standard first team payment of £500.¹²⁸ Moreover, there is some evidence that up to 1910 certain clubs avoided paying benefits altogether by transferring players shortly before their benefits were due, thereby denying them possibly several hundreds of pounds and ensuring them merely the £10 signing-on bonus for their new club.¹²⁹

However, from 1910 League rules entitled a player transferred before completing his five years qualification for a benefit to receive an accrued share of it: that is, a sum

¹²⁴ Korr, *West Ham United*, p. 186.

¹²⁵ Minutes of Aston Villa FC, 14, 28 November 1911.

¹²⁶ *Athletic News*, 4 December 1911.

¹²⁷ Minutes of Aston Villa FC, 19 December 1911.

¹²⁸ Minutes of West Ham United FC, 7, 29 April, 6 May 1930.

¹²⁹ See *Athletic News*, 11 March 1907.

commensurate to the length of his qualifying service and the amount which he would have received if not transferred. Initially the amount the player could receive was regarded as a share of the transfer fee and was given in proportion to the increased fee made by the selling club, but in practice the Management Committee tended to link such payments to presumed benefits rather than the size of the transfer fee.¹³⁰ In ideal circumstances the player was adequately recompensed by his former club for loss of benefit. West Ham United was certainly happy to pay its star forward Sid Puddefoot £390 (as a three year percentage of the expected £650 benefit) on his transfer to Falkirk for £5,000 in 1922 - a new record for a player moving from a Football League to a Scottish League club.¹³¹ Yet where the transfer fee was minimal, or the player had left the club in acrimony, such amounts were less likely. Sometimes requests by players were refused outright, as was the case with Radford at Sheffield United and, after protracted contract and benefit negotiations, Hampson at West Ham.¹³² Indeed, players adjudged to have precipitated the transfer had no entitlement to the accrued benefit payment under League rules: Frank Barson's move from Aston Villa to Manchester United was one such example where 'the player, by his conduct and his demands on the club, had practically forced [them] to transfer him' and therefore received nothing.¹³³ In addition, the League Management Committee often intervened to reduce what it considered to be inflated sums already agreed between clubs and players. This practice became particularly contentious during 1921 when the Players' Union wrote to the League asking them to reconsider a number of cases in which transferred players had had their guaranteed payments severely cut by the Committee. According to Union chairman Charlie Roberts, 'the player being transferred is in a blind alley - everything is subject to the consent of the Football League, and they, as representatives of the clubs, keep the amount the player receives down as far as possible'.¹³⁴

¹³⁰ See Sutcliffe *et al.*, *Football League*, p. 119; *Athletic News*, 1 June 1914.

¹³¹ Minutes of West Ham United FC, 13 February 1922; Korr, *West Ham United*, p. 59.

¹³² Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 16 July 1931; Minutes of West Ham United FC, 14 December 1925.

¹³³ Minutes of Football League, 18 December 1922.

¹³⁴ Minutes of AFPTU, 2 February 1921.

Other important aspects of the League's 1910 financial package included the introduction of talent money and the legalisation of bonuses for Cup tie wins. Clubs finishing in the top five of both divisions were henceforth entitled to distribute amongst their squads sums ranging from £275 for the first placed club to £55 for the fifth and corresponding amounts for FA Cup success. From 1920 a flat rate bonus of £2 for a win and £1 for a draw in all League matches and cup ties was adopted, with smaller bonuses of £1 and 10s. respectively for third division clubs. Reserve players could also theoretically receive small bonuses (initially 10s. and 5s. but doubled in 1921) although certain clubs and reserve leagues refused to sanction such payments.¹³⁵ Talent money and bonuses had initially been advocated partly as a means of rewarding exceptional players 'who received no more... than the mere mediocrity' under the maximum wage rule.¹³⁶ Most League clubs accepted such payments as 'tantamount to a commission in addition to salary in commercial life' but some agreed with the FA's William Pickford that bonuses for match results constituted a form of bribery and meant paying the player twice over for the same work.¹³⁷ In 1908 the Players' Union had suggested a marks system based on the 'good conduct and skill' of players, similar to that operated by first class cricket counties, but most clubs opposed the idea of individual rewards in an essentially collective team sport.¹³⁸ Notwithstanding initial pockets of opposition, most clubs good enough to win matches, cups and championships were prepared to let their employees share financially in the success. Yet when clubs refused to do so, as occurred with a recently transferred member of the 1912/13 Preston promotion side, the Management Committee had no powers of compulsion.¹³⁹ Furthermore, as the Players' Union pointed out in 1937, these extra payments affected only a small minority of the professionals engaged by the 88 Football League clubs. Even within the most successful clubs, talent money was related exclusively to the performance of

¹³⁵ Sutcliffe *et al.*, *Football League*, p. 119; Minutes of AFPTU, 23 February 1920; Minutes of Football League, 13 September, 11 October 1920.

¹³⁶ Report of meeting of Football League Clubs in *Athletic News*, 23 May 1904.

¹³⁷ See Report of FA AGM in *Athletic News*, 4 June 1906. Also the series featuring opinions on the bonus system. *Athletic News*, 8, 15 and 29 January 1906.

¹³⁸ Minutes of AFPU, 1 April 1908.

¹³⁹ Minutes of Football League, 26 May 1913.

the first team and, as we have seen, the extension of match bonuses to reserve team players was only partial.¹⁴⁰

For the best players there were a number of additional opportunities to make money. International match fees were £1 at the turn of the century, rising to £4 in 1907, £6 in 1921 and finally £20 by 1939 but this was still a relatively small sum given the infrequency of such matches - generally fewer than five each season - and the large revenue internationals generated for the respective FAs.¹⁴¹ Continental tours, at both representative and club level, could bring some return either in the form of extra pay or gifts like the silver medals given to members of the Nottingham Forest team during their visit to Argentina in 1905.¹⁴² However, from 1912 the Management Committee decided that players 'must not be allowed to make a profit' on such tours and closely monitored their financial arrangements. Thus while some players had previously been paid as much as £1 per day in addition to their regular wage, daily allowances of only 5s. to cover expenses were common during the inter-war period.¹⁴³ As Mason and Wagg have both noted, some of the better players could also theoretically boost their incomes through advertising and the endorsement of goods, especially football equipment and new leisure products like cigarettes, as well as through writing newspaper columns.¹⁴⁴ Yet it is misleading to assume, as Jones does, that financial benefits inevitably flowed from such commercial contacts. In fact in many cases players were used to endorse products without their knowledge, let alone any prior agreement, and were therefore unlikely to significantly increase their incomes in this way. Members of the triple-championship winning Arsenal squad of the early 1930s, for instance, were often featured in advertisements for which they were either unpaid or received merely a token gift, while 'Dixie' Dean, who claimed that throughout his career he had received just one ex-gratia payment of £50 from a cigarette firm for the use of his image, considered himself particularly exploited by advertisers.¹⁴⁵ In addition, all gifts from either club committees or supporters were closely monitored

¹⁴⁰ Minutes of AFPTU, 23 August 1937 (AGM).

¹⁴¹ Green, *Football Association*, p. 415.

¹⁴² Tony Mason, *Passion of the People?: Football in South America*, London, 1995, p. 18.

¹⁴³ Minutes of Football League, 9 August 1912; Minutes of West Ham United FC, 8 May 1923.

¹⁴⁴ Mason, *Association Football*, pp. 97-98; Wagg, *Football World*, p. 14.

¹⁴⁵ Jones, 'Economic Aspects', p. 294; John Harding, *Alex James*, London, 1988, pp. 165-68; Nick Walsh, *Dixie Dean*, London, 1977, p. 69.

and regulated by the Management Committee. Presentations or collections, such as those organised by Everton supporters for their FA Cup winning team of 1906 and by 'admirers' of Sheffield United and Ireland forward Gillespie during a match in Belfast in 1923, were generally prohibited, although from the early 1920s clubs were permitted to give wedding presents not exceeding a specific sum and pay for the removal expenses of new signings subject to Management Committee approval.¹⁴⁶

Illegal payments and inducements must also be recognised as an important element of the informal financial relationship between League clubs and players. The precise extent of the practice is difficult to calculate although there is no doubt that the inquiries and commissions instigated by the League and FA touched only the tip of the iceberg. Fred Rinder told the FA Council in 1908 that the rules restricting wages, signing-on fees and bonuses 'were being broken daily' and the Players' Union agreed that 'nearly all Football League... clubs had broken the rules for their own advantage'.¹⁴⁷ Even Sheffield United, whose committee - chaired by puritanical FA president Charles Clegg - was known for its high moral stance, was accused of paying illegal bonuses and wages in 1905 and 1910 respectively and had its books inspected for financial irregularities by a League commission in 1921, though in each case nothing was proven.¹⁴⁸ Stars like Billy Meredith could certainly benefit substantially from illegal payments of this kind. As a Manchester City player between 1902 and 1906, Meredith apparently received £6 per week (£2 above the maximum) and in excess of £50 a year in bonuses. Similar payments seem to have been made to Meredith while he was with Manchester United through a special account in his name and that of another team mate. An FA commission found that as much as £598 had been paid into the account during a four-month period in 1907 alone.¹⁴⁹ Meredith was fined and suspended in both cases but other leading players and clubs were clearly more fortunate in escaping detection. However, for the majority of players in the

¹⁴⁶ *Athletic News*, 30 April 1906; Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 24 October 1923; Minutes of Football League, 7 March 1921.

¹⁴⁷ Report of FA AGM in *Athletic News*, 1 June 1908; Minutes of AFPU, 15 December 1908 (AGM).

¹⁴⁸ Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 29 November 1905; 9, 23 March 1910; 4 October 1921.

¹⁴⁹ Report of FA Commission into Manchester City FC in *Athletic News*, 4 June 1906; FA Report and Recommendation of the Commission adopted by the Council re. Manchester United FC, 30 March 1910.

lower divisions, whose objective was probably to attain the legal maximum, illegal payments of this nature were far less likely.

Nevertheless many observers both inside and outside football clearly believed that League professionals were well paid. In the opinion of John Lewis: 'a man who gets £4 for five years, and then a £350 benefit, followed by another after a second five years, does uncommonly well for himself, and... makes a far better start in life than ninety-nine hundredths of those in a similar station'.¹⁵⁰ Fellow Committee member Sutcliffe believed that players 'want all the wages, all the bonuses and all the transfer fees they can get', and one critic agreed that 'the professional is endeavouring to make out of the commercial side of the game'.¹⁵¹ Reactions of this type partly reflected the concentration of the press and, increasingly by the 1930s, the electronic media on the activities of the top players and clubs: the Players' Union certainly thought that such distorted coverage gave the public an impression that 'the player was doing wonderfully well'.¹⁵² Yet it has been widely recognised by historians that, in comparison to other broadly defined working-class occupations, professional football did indeed offer substantial remuneration.¹⁵³ As Table 5.13 indicates, the basic earnings of a first or second division footballer on the maximum wage - excluding benefits or other extra payments - easily outstripped the average salary of clerks, skilled and semi-skilled workers and even supervisors and foremen throughout the period. Thus, for instance, a professional with Stoke or Burslem Port Vale in 1906 who earned up to £4 per week was clearly better off than a worker in any part of the region's pottery industry, with the possible exception of those at the peak of the wage hierarchy, such as firemen. Fishwick has also correctly noted that players with Sheffield United or Wednesday between the wars were earning from two to three times the wage of workers in the local steel industry.¹⁵⁴ Those further down the wage structure, like Fletcher and Richmond (Table 5.13), were closer to the foremen

¹⁵⁰ *Football and Sports Special*, 27 February 1909.

¹⁵¹ *Athletic News*, 11 January 1909; Catton Folders, E-F, T. W. Annal to William Pickford, 13 September 1909, p. 501.

¹⁵² Minutes of AFPTU, 27 February 1939 (EGM).

¹⁵³ See especially Mason, *Association Football*, pp. 101-03.

¹⁵⁴ Whipp, *Patterns of Labour*, pp. 58-63; Fishwick, *English Football*, p. 80.

category, but even they would probably have taken home more when extra payments are considered.

Table 5.13 Comparison of Average Annual Earnings of Clerks, Foremen, Skilled and Semi-Skilled Workers with Football League Professionals, 1906-35 (in pounds).

	1906	1924	1935
Clerks	-	182	192
Foremen, Supervisors, inspectors	113	268	273
Skilled Workers	97	182	197
Semi-Skilled Workers*	63	126	134
Football League Professional (Maximum Wage)	208	386	386
(Fletcher, West Ham United FC)		260	
(Richmond, Walsall FC)			211

* Including agricultural occupations.

Source: Routh, *Occupation and Pay in Great Britain*, pp. 92, 98, 101, 109; Minutes of West Ham United FC, 28 April 1924; Walsall FC Players' Registration Book, 1932-46, 522/1/66.

In many respects, however, such comparisons are less appropriate than those with employees in other football leagues, sports and entertainment industries. For a first team player at a leading Football League club, there was really nowhere to go to improve one's earnings. The Scottish League had no maximum wage but generally only Rangers, Celtic and Hearts offered its players more than the equivalent maximum in England. At the other end of the scale, players in the second and short-lived third divisions were commonly part-timers and could receive as little as 15s. and in some cases 7s. 6d. weekly.¹⁵⁵ The Southern League operated similar maximum wage restrictions to those of the League prior to amalgamation in 1920 and were subject to the same FA rules regarding extra payments. In 1920 it decided to abolish wage limits and, for a short time, some clubs evidently offered terms far exceeding Football League levels: *Athletic News* reported that one player who had been left off both the retain and transfer lists of his League club was given an agreement for £600 a season (almost £16 weekly in the playing season) by a Southern League rival.¹⁵⁶ Overseas clubs could also often offer higher basic salaries although leagues abroad were slower to develop, smaller and generally less stable than the Football League. Nonetheless, the soccer section of the New York Giants baseball club was reputedly able to offer Everton's 'Dixie' Dean £25 per week in 1928 while unemployed League players were obtaining agreements with French clubs during the depression on terms 'far in excess

¹⁵⁵ Vamplew, *Pay Up*, p. 224; Crampsey, *First 100 Years*, p. 79.

¹⁵⁶ *Athletic News*, 19 July 1920.

of maximum wages in England'. The maximum wage in the French League was set at 2,000 Francs per month in 1933, exactly double the wage of a skilled French worker but equivalent to just £5 a week in England. Bonuses and illegal payments could swell this figure considerably, however.¹⁵⁷

In cricket, the parallel national sport, the earnings of the top players were not markedly dissimilar from those in football. At the turn of the century a good cricket professional playing for a relatively prosperous county could make about £275 a year with possible increases in the form of test match pay, benefits or talent money. Lesser players might only receive basic groundstaff wages and be deprived of winter pay, though most counties had introduced it in some form by the 1900s. By the inter-war period county professionals could make up to a maximum of £440 per annum, though most received under £400.¹⁵⁸ Earnings were considerably higher in more commercialised sports like horse racing, boxing and baseball. Top flat jockeys often received several thousand pounds a year in retainers, riding fees and other gifts and even moderate jockeys at the turn of the century could make £1,000 in a season: national hunt riding fees were even higher - five guineas for a losing ride and ten for winning throughout the period - but retainers were scarcer and fewer meetings often led to periodic unemployment for some.¹⁵⁹ Purses in major professional boxing contests varied from £100 to £1,500 and more for international and world title fights. But even these figures were dwarfed by those open to baseball players in America. The average annual salary was \$3,000 in 1910 but rose to \$5,000 in 1923 and had reached over \$7,500 six years later - incomes which compared favourably to those of dentists, doctors, lawyers, professors and other upper-middle class occupations. The star players, meanwhile, earned much more: Pittsburgh's Honus Wagner was paid \$18,000 in 1911 and Detroit's Ty Cobb made at least \$20,000 in 1915.¹⁶⁰ According to Wagg, entertainers became a key reference group for the leading footballers only

¹⁵⁷ *Topical Times*, 11 August 1928; Minutes of AFPTU, 26 August 1936 (AGM); Alfred Wahl and Pierre Lanfranchi, *Les Footballeurs Professionnels*, Hachette, 1995, pp. 63-67.

¹⁵⁸ Vamplew, *Pay Up*, pp. 218-22; Jack Williams, 'Cricket' in Mason (ed.), *Sport in Britain*, p. 125. Also see Sissons, *The Players*, pp. 93-125, 205-21.

¹⁵⁹ Vamplew, *Pay Up*, pp. 216-18; Roger Munting, *Hedges and Hurdles: A Social and Economic History of National Hunt Racing*, London, 1987, pp. 130-34.

¹⁶⁰ Stan Shipley, 'Tom Causer of Bermondsey: A Boxer Hero of the 1890s', *History Workshop Journal*, 15, 1983, pp. 43, 48; Steven A. Riess, 'Professional Baseball and Social Mobility', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 11, 2, 1980, pp. 239-40.

during the 1940s and 1950s, but there is plenty of evidence to suggest that this perspective had in fact developed by the 1920s and 1930s (see chapter 9).¹⁶¹ Yet star footballers' remuneration did not come close to the £50 plus a week which actors in the upper range could earn before 1914. Film work could pay stars as much as £3-5,000 per picture in the 1920s and even more with the introduction of sound, although stage work might only guarantee £20 a week. However, earnings were extremely uneven in the acting profession, with estimates putting the average weekly income of actors in 1914 at £2 or even 27s.: a level of pay equivalent to the very bottom of the wage scale at most League clubs.¹⁶²

4. Conclusion

The role of the Football League in the field of players' contracts, earnings and transfers has been largely overlooked in previous work but it remains vital in forming a complete understanding of the operation of the labour market in top-level football. Clubs were, of course, the employers of players and the first port-of-call in contract or wage negotiations but directorates were themselves constrained by League regulations and the policy of the executive, which set the boundaries of players' earnings, sanctioned all payments and transfers and, in the final analysis, effectively *owned* players through its control of their registration. By 1939 the autonomy of clubs in all financial matters regarding its employees had been strictly limited: though it hardly controlled the purse strings of its members, the Management Committee had an effective veto on how players were rewarded.

The League acted therefore as both a regulator of the labour market and a referee in disputes between clubs and players. The extent to which it was an impartial referee remains inconclusive, although the assumptions of Tischler, Dabscheck and others that the League was one part of a powerful 'triple alliance' along with the clubs and the FA intent on enslaving players and restricting their earning and employment opportunities needs to be discarded.¹⁶³ The retain-and-transfer system and other

¹⁶¹ Wagg, *Football World*, p. 102.

¹⁶² Michael Sanderson, *From Irving to Olivier: A Social History of the Acting Profession in England, 1880-1983*, London, 1984, pp. 79-86, 217.

¹⁶³ See Tischler, *Footballers and Businessmen*, pp. 105-22; Dabscheck, 'Defensive Manchester'.

contract regulations were clearly weighted against the player but it is instructive to note that the League often ruled in favour of the player when disputes arose and that both the executive and clubs were often prepared to loosen the restrictive hold of both the retain list and high transfer fees in order to help players get another job. Under their most extreme interpretation the League's regulations could indeed be highly oppressive, but Committeemen, directors and players worked in an environment which was perhaps less oppositional and antagonistic than the factory or the shop floor and in which the horizontal allegiances of footballers to their fellow workers had to be married with vertical loyalties to the club and the directors.

CHAPTER SIX

PLAYERS AND LABOUR RELATIONS

The ways in which Football League clubs treated their employees, dealt with labour disputes and tried to establish workplace compliance, and the corresponding attitude and behaviour of players, have been topics barely touched by historians. We have some idea of the rise and significance of the Players' Union but little sense of how football unionism could be complemented by other less institutionalised forms of protest. More than this, existing accounts of relations between the player and his employers have tended to apply the notion of paternalism without sufficient explanation or conceptual precision. According to Mason, clubs exhibited

a strange kind of paternalism in which the players were treated rather like some Victorian middle-class wives; stifling their independence perhaps, but cushioning them from some of the natural contingencies of life which most working people could rarely face with equanimity.¹

And Korr's study of West Ham United has similarly suggested that the club tended to 'assume the dual role of employer and parent towards its players'.² The main difficulty with these and other references to paternalism as a managerial strategy is that they tend to emphasise one facet of the concept - that involving kindness and benevolence - as its defining characteristic when, in fact, ideas of firm rule including disciplinary and punitive measures as well as guidance and supervision were arguably more important.³ Moreover, the use of paternalism as a tool for understanding the nature of labour relations is clearly more appropriate to the late nineteenth and early twentieth century periods of Mason's and Vamplew's work than the whole period up to 1939 discussed here. By the turn of the century, welfarism was competing with, but more often complementing, paternalism within Football League boardrooms in the same way as it was outside, and the moral responsibility of the director towards 'his boys' tended to operate alongside a new legal obligation towards the worker.

¹ Mason, *Association Football*, pp. 106-07.

² Korr, *West Ham United*, p. 171.

³ David Roberts, *Paternalism in Early Victorian England*, London, 1979, pp. 5-6.

Above all, it should not be assumed that club directors and League officials always displayed in their values and actions a generous concern for the well-being of players. Rather, this chapter accepts Joseph Melling's observation that most welfare policies and other examples of paternalism 'were devised by employers with a rational concern for efficiency and profitability in the enterprise rather than being the result of spontaneous and altruistic gestures'.⁴ Indeed it will be argued that while most League employers did gradually come to realise the imperative, both in a financial and sporting sense, of looking after their players, this was often prompted by the desire to safeguard the club rather than the player.

1. Control and Discipline

In League football, as in other areas of industry, the control and discipline of employees was a crucial aspect of labour relations and here paternalistic strategies seem to have been most clearly evident. The first example of this was in the treatment of injured or sick players - especially at the start of the period and before the standardisation of welfare provision - which will be examined in detail in the final section of this chapter. Secondly, it was reflected in the involvement of some clubs in the financial affairs of their players. Loans to players in debt were particularly common although such applications were always vetted and often rejected. For example, in 1910 the Sheffield United board reluctantly agreed to clear Walton's debts, including those to a money lender, 'on condition he disclosed all his liabilities and promised he would not [again] get into debt', and, eighteen years later, supervised the repayment from Chandler's wages of subscriptions he had embezzled while acting as Player's Union collector for the club.⁵ There were also instances of clubs loaning small sums of money to help players purchase houses or partake in other investments

⁴ Joseph Melling, 'Employers, Workplace Culture and Workers' Politics: British Industry and Workers' Welfare Programmes, 1870-1920' in Joseph Melling and Jonathan Barry (eds.), *Culture in History: Production, Consumption and Values in Historical Perspective*, Exeter, 1992, p. 112. The earliest expression of this argument can be found in Roy Hay, 'Employers and Social Policy in Britain: The Evolution of Welfare Legislation, 1905-14', *Social History*, 4, 1977, pp. 435-55.

⁵ Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 14 December 1910; 31 October, 4 November 1928.

but these were less common and, in any case, such loans were regarded as an advance of wages, to be repaid in weekly instalments at an agreed rate.⁶

Some clubs similarly assisted their part-time professionals in obtaining employment, both directly and indirectly. Club directors occasionally employed players in their own businesses or, more commonly, were assisted by local firms who considered themselves 'supporters' of the club.⁷ Charles Buchan was promised a job by Fulham in his chosen profession as a teacher if he signed professional forms with the club; on a grander scale, Alex James was lured to Arsenal by the assurance of a sports demonstrator's job at the famous West End store Selfridges.⁸ In 1908 Aston Villa wrote to the owner of Ansell's brewery in an attempt to secure a clerkship at about 30s. a week for James Logan, one of its Scottish imports, and went so far as to issue the following circular to local employers in 1912:

As several of our players are particularly anxious to obtain some kind of employment, we shall be glad to know whether you or any of your friends could assist us in finding them situations. Some of them can write shorthand, use a typewriter and have had considerable experience in law and commercial work, as well as in travelling. Others are suitable as warehousemen etc...⁹

Yet, as we have noted, while paternalism clearly inferred kindness and benevolence, it also involved contradictory strategies of punishment and discipline.¹⁰ Players could be censured, fined and even suspended for failure to carry out their 'work', in the form either of training or competitive matches. Most League clubs required their full-time professionals to train mornings and afternoons at least three times a week and drafted specific training rules with which players were expected to comply. At Millwall players were required to clock-in by signing the Training Book each morning and

⁶ Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 30 August 1905, 9 November 1910, 1 February, 9 May 1928.

⁷ See Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 17 September 1902. Sunderland's success during the 1890s has been partly explained by their ability to find employment for their players. Tischler, *Footballers and Businessmen*, p. 94; Mason, *Association Football*, pp. 95-96.

⁸ Buchan, *Lifetime in Football*, p. 16; Harding, *Alex James*, pp. 100-01.

⁹ AV, 47/82, Ramsay to Mr. Ansell, 16 August 1907; *Huddersfield Weekly Examiner*, 31 August 1912.

¹⁰ See Russell, 'Local Elites and the Working-Class Response', pp. 154-55.

afternoon and to obtain the manager's or trainer's permission before leaving.¹¹ In 1902 the Sheffield United Committee informed its players that neglect of training in future would lead to fines but when several players did break the rules they were given only nominal fines of 2s. 6d., and even these were later rescinded.¹² From 1923 League regulations formally recognised the club's power 'to suspend or fine players guilty of misconduct or breach of disciplinary rule' and in minor cases punishments were restricted to 14 days suspension or an equivalent fine.¹³ Prolonged absences and non-attendance at matches were viewed more seriously. When Simmons went absent without leave from West Ham in October 1921 he was immediately suspended *sine die* and reported to both the League and the FA. In late January 1922 the club lifted his suspension and played him in a series of first team matches but by April he had gone missing again, forcing the board to effectively sever his connection with the club by suspending him until the end of the season.¹⁴ Birmingham chose to cancel the agreement of Charles Sprigg with 14 days notice in 1913 for breaching disciplinary rules by failing to report for pre-season training.¹⁵ In general, however, even players who missed games received only small fines - £1 for three West Ham reserves in 1922¹⁶ - or temporary suspensions and were unlikely to find their future career prospects permanently damaged.

More severe punishments were dealt to players found guilty of dishonesty or insolence. The Management Committee's action in sanctioning Barnsley's suspension of George Travers *sine die* for 'absence from training and using insulting language to the directors'¹⁷ was fairly typical but in extreme cases, like that of Aston Villa's Buckley, the full weight of the punitive system was brought to bear on the player. Buckley had claimed that a Villa director offered him a £250 bonus on re-signing to make up for his disappointing benefit and when the board refused to pay he threatened not to play for the club again. Not surprisingly, the League Commission

¹¹ See Minutes of Oldham Athletic FC, 7 August, 4 September 1906; PFA, File 35, Millwall FC Rules to Players, 1933 (Appendix 11).

¹² Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 6 January, 11, 18 February 1903.

¹³ Report of Football League AGM in *Athletic News*, 4 June 1923.

¹⁴ Minutes of West Ham United FC, 4 October 1921, 18 January, 18 April 1922.

¹⁵ Minutes of Football League, 1 September 1913.

¹⁶ Minutes of West Ham United FC, 6 November 1922.

¹⁷ Minutes of Football League, 2 February 1914.

investigating the affair rejected the player's version of events and judged that no bonus had been offered to the player. As Buckley's demand was contrary to League rules and, in view of his general insubordinate attitude, the Commission fined him £24 and suspended him for two seasons - a sentence which remained in force despite numerous protestations by Buckley to both Villa and the Management Committee.¹⁸ The League could use other methods to punish players who were believed to be dishonest. For instance, O'Doherty's application for a reduction of his transfer fee was put on hold until he apologised to the Management Committee and his club 'for deliberately making misleading statements to both Committees'.¹⁹ The most serious penalties, however, were reserved for alleged match-fixers. Billy Meredith was suspended for the 1905/06 season after offering an opponent £10 to let Manchester City win a crucial championship decider, although *Athletic News* considered that Meredith had been treated extremely leniently and that the offence 'ought to have ended his football career'.²⁰ Fulham's Bernard Travers was not so fortunate when he was 'permanently suspended from taking part in football' by the FA after approaching a South Shields player with a monetary offer to throw their second division match.²¹

The discipline and control of employees on the field of play was also a pervasive concern of club directors and the football authorities. Directors, or secretary-managers, may have controlled the selection of teams but at most clubs the playing or tactical element, such as it existed, remained in the hands of trainers and senior players for much of the period. Perhaps the most significant tactical innovation of the era, the offside trap, was unquestionably introduced and perfected by players: first, by the full-back pairing of Morley and Montgomery at Notts County, and then by Bill McCracken of Newcastle United.²² The position of captain, in particular, often carried with it considerable authority. The captain was normally a senior professional who acted as players' spokesman in negotiations with the board. At Aston Villa, for example, captain Joe Bache could request that the first team 'be sent away for a week

¹⁸ Minutes of Aston Villa FC, 7, 10 September, 1 October, 17 December 1912; Minutes of Football League, 26 May, 3 November 1913.

¹⁹ Minutes of Football League, 26 July 1920.

²⁰ *Athletic News*, 4 June 1906. On Meredith see John Harding, *Football Wizard: The Story of Billy Meredith*, Derby, 1985, pp. 93-115.

²¹ Minutes of FA Emergency Committee, 21 March-22 April 1922.

²² Buchan, *Lifetime in Football*, pp. 29-30; Sharpe, *40 Years in Football*, p. 108.

as he thought some of them were stale'. Two months later the board acceded to the request by sending the team for special training at Southport.²³ Significantly, however, the captain could also be used by the directors as a type of overlooker on the field of play. One clause in the agreement of Small Heath players from the mid-1890s stipulated that 'The said player shall always obey the captain of the team in which he is playing, and shall be obedient to his orders and commands.'²⁴ In 1924 the West Ham board expressly acknowledged the captain's right to alter the formation and tactics of the team on the field and the Millwall players were likewise informed that while the manager and trainer determined the 'general plan of play' before the match, the 'control of tactics on the field is in the hands of the captain'.²⁵ Moreover, while players undoubtedly enjoyed relative freedom to do as they pleased during matches, their play and conduct were ultimately subject to close scrutiny by their employers. Indifferent performances or improper conduct on the field often led to the player being warned or brought before the board of directors. Villa's James Logan found himself in trouble on two occasions during 1911: first for alleged bad captaincy in a reserve match in March, and then for unsatisfactory play in a first team fixture in December.²⁶ Earlier the same year another Villa player was summoned to see the directors and severely cautioned 'for dirty play and foul language', while West Ham took immediate action when its England international forward Vic Watson was reported to have kicked an opponent in an FA Cup tie by dropping him for the following League match.²⁷

Clubs were expected to control the behaviour of their players as far as possible but even FA spokesmen like William Pickford recognised that ultimately 'a club cannot answer for a player when he has stepped on to the field'.²⁸ As we saw in Chapter 3, the FA rather than the League was the main authority for the disciplining of foul play and other on-field misconduct, regularly issuing fines and suspensions to players found guilty. Fishwick has noted that such penalties became progressively stiffer in

²³ Minutes of Aston Villa FC, 28 February, 18 April 1911.

²⁴ PFA, File 2, Small Heath FC Players' Agreement, 1896/97 (see Appendix 9).

²⁵ Minutes of West Ham United FC, 11 February 1924; PFA, File 35, Millwall FC Players' Weekly Diary, 1933. Also see Stanley Cullis, *All For The Wolves*, London, 1961, p. 14.

²⁶ Minutes of Aston Villa FC, 7 March, 21 December 1911.

²⁷ Minutes of Aston Villa FC, 3 January 1911; Minutes of West Ham United FC, 2, 9 March 1925.

²⁸ *Athletic News*, 15 March 1909.

the inter-war period, rising from an average of one to two weeks suspension before 1914 to two to four weeks by 1930/31. Furthermore, the number of players punished almost doubled with the creation of the FA Disciplinary Committee in 1936, leading the Players' Union to protest that players were being suspended for 'trivial offences' which had often not even led to a sending-off.²⁹ Dodds' two week suspension and £8 fine for a reported 'incident' was thus not an uncommon punishment in the late 1930s.³⁰ In most cases this type of discipline represented only a temporary financial and professional setback for a player but it could lead to far more serious consequences, as the case of William Cook shows. Cook's refusal to leave the pitch after being dismissed by the referee led to the abandonment of a League match between Oldham Athletic and Middlesbrough in 1915. The FA suspended him for one year on account of his 'misconduct on the field and gross misconduct in refusing to leave the ground when ordered by the referee' and, in addition, a League Commission excluded him from any involvement in League football indefinitely and ordered him to pay the entire costs of the inquiry.³¹

Attempts to control the off-field activities of players were also crucial to many League clubs. Aston Villa's plans to build a club house with billiard tables and reading and writing rooms during the 1890s clearly reflected a desire among the directors to control the social lives of their employees, and especially to shelter them from the bad influences that might result from them being left to their own devices. At Sheffield United the billiard room in the cricket pavilion was utilized for a similar purpose. All players living in the city were required to attend the billiard room on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday evenings and failure to do so without a legitimate excuse could lead to disciplinary action.³² As late as the 1930s Millwall required all sick or injured players to be at home by 8 p.m. each evening while squad members were subject to a 10 p.m. curfew the evening prior to match days. Here, as elsewhere, weekend leave

²⁹ Fishwick, *English Football*, pp. 84-85; Minutes of AFPTU, 8 February 1937.

³⁰ Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 24 March 1937.

³¹ Catton Folders, C-D, Report on Suspension of William Cook, 19 April 1915, p. 291.

³² Mason, *Association Football*, p. 107; Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 10 September 1902, 6 December 1904. From Tottenham Hotspur's Southern League days, the club room at White Hart Lane seems to have served a similar purpose, and was allegedly used as a model by other clubs. James Cameron, 'The Tottenham Hotspur FC: Its Story and Progress', *Book of Football*, p. 82.

was permitted only under 'very special circumstances'.³³ Directors also used widely recognised paternal forms of management such as social evenings, whist drives and outings to improve personal relations between the employers and the workforce and encourage collective loyalty and commitment to the club.³⁴ For a short time Sheffield United even arranged for a local golf club to take on its players, directors and officials as winter members and organised regular club visits. By the 1930s many clubs were also arranging activities for players during the close season, possibly with the dual purpose of keeping them fit and under close supervision. West Ham players, for example, were competing in cricket, tennis and golf tournaments as well as swimming galas, often against rival football clubs, during July and August of each year.³⁵ However, while it is difficult to know exactly how they reacted to and interpreted these activities, it appears that, in the main, players' social lives remained in their own hands. The West Ham board itself recognised that club social evenings were difficult to organise as 'players had always shown a marked preference for arranging their own social affairs'.³⁶

Living arrangements were a further area in which League clubs sought to exert control over their workforces. Most players were encouraged to live within the immediate district so that they could attend training sessions throughout the week. West Ham preferred their men to live 'within distance of the ground' and Sheffield United actually ruled in 1908 that 'all players signed on in future must reside in the Sheffield district' but such proclamations proved difficult to maintain in practice.³⁷ In 1920 the Aston Villa directors, employing a similar residency rule, found themselves in a protracted dispute with three of the club's senior players who refused to move to Birmingham. The directors were eventually forced to back down and allow the players to live at home.³⁸ In fact, compromises were generally struck in cases where

³³ PFA, File 35, Millwall FC Rules to Players, 1933 (see Appendix 11).

³⁴ See Whipp, *Patterns of Labour*, pp. 140-41; John Griffiths, "'Give My Regards to Uncle Billy...': The Rites and Rituals of Company Life at Lever Brothers, c.1900-c.1990", *Business History*, 37, 4, 1995, pp. 33-35.

³⁵ Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 5, 18 August 1937; Minutes of West Ham United, 31 July, 14 August 1934; 13 August 1935.

³⁶ Minutes of West Ham United FC, 3 December 1934.

³⁷ Minutes of West Ham United FC, 28 March 1922; Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 19 August 1908.

³⁸ Minutes of Aston Villa FC, September-November 1920, *passim*.

the player had an established job, business interests or had to care for a sick relative but it was made clear to players that such allowances could not continue indefinitely. Players living within the stipulated area could also find themselves forced to move from accommodation which the club considered unsatisfactory. Aston Villa requested three of its players 'to change their present lodgings forthwith or be suspended', though the minutes provide no explanation as to why; and the same club reacted to information that seven employees were lodging together in a small double bedroomed house by pointing out that this 'was not conducive to good health' and ordering some to move.³⁹ West Ham United was not the only club which began to take direct responsibility for the housing of players in the inter-war period, a situation which Korr believes 'worked to the benefit of all concerned' and, moreover, exemplified the paternalism of the club.⁴⁰ New players were often placed in lodgings with a team-mate or, if married, in a rented club house.⁴¹ It was certainly another way for the board to play detective and keep the private activities of the players under close surveillance. Huddersfield Town, for instance, required all lodgings to be approved by the club and expected the landlord or landlady to report 'the hours kept and conduct of the players'.⁴²

The control of players also involved steering them more directly away from immoral or antisocial behaviour, though the motive could be physical as well as moral. Many employers warned their players of the dangers of smoking, gambling or borrowing from loan sharks but some took more direct action. Possibly as a means of preventing overindulgence, the Sheffield United committee requested the trainer to monitor weekly changes in the weight of each player.⁴³ The Aston Villa directors were so concerned about their players 'drinking and misconducting themselves' that they employed a private detective to investigate the worst offenders. One player was found to have been drunk several times a week, once with a team-mate two days before an

³⁹ Minutes of Aston Villa FC, 4 January 1900; 31 October 1911.

⁴⁰ Korr, *West Ham United*, p. 179.

⁴¹ See AV, 52/82, Ramsay to G. N. Robinson, 22 July 1919; W. Askew to Mr. Lowes, 8 June 1937, Walsall Record Office, 522/1/66; Minutes of Aston Villa FC, 2 May, 27 June, 18 July 1922; George F. Allison, *Allison Calling*, London, 1948, p. 76.

⁴² Minutes of Huddersfield Town FC, 12 April 1939.

⁴³ Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 10 February 1904.

important match, and was disciplined accordingly. Two first team players involved in an assault case also received a 'severe reprimand' from the Villa chairman, though they got off lightly compared with the West Ham player who was suspended indefinitely and had his agreement cancelled after being sentenced to three months hard labour.⁴⁴ The former club also discouraged its players from betting on horses or visiting racetracks.⁴⁵ Other clubs evidently kept less tight reins on their players. Leicester Fosse, for one, received criticism in the press for allowing its team to attend wedding celebrations the night before a match which it lost 12-0.⁴⁶ Contracted employees at certain clubs were also prohibited from any involvement, as either workers or owners, with drinking or gambling establishments. As we have seen, League and FA officials were particularly strict when players became associated with gambling, and stepped in quickly to prevent stars like Andy Ducat and Ernest Needham (when he was a coach at Sheffield United) from taking jobs as newspaper tipsters.⁴⁷ The forecasting of match results was not the only right which League footballers were denied. During the late 1920s and 1930s the FA cracked down on 'the growing practice of players contributing signed reports and articles containing criticisms of their colleagues and opponents, and giving interviews to the press' and encouraged League clubs to 'take the necessary steps' to stop the practice. Though such resolutions did not preclude players from writing for the press, they did seek to influence what was said, a situation which the Union secretary regarded as 'a further curtailment of the players' liberties'.⁴⁸ The possible threat of injury and the provisions of the club's insurance policy also convinced the West Ham directors to forbid their players from using 'motor cycles, or [indulging] in aviation or any other dangerous pursuit', while Huddersfield Town placed a similar ban on its employees driving motor cars.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ Minutes of Aston Villa FC, 28 December 1899, 8 March 1900; 11 January 1900; Minutes of West Ham United FC, 17 November 1919.

⁴⁵ Minutes of Aston Villa FC, 8 November 1910, 5 September 1911.

⁴⁶ *Athletic News*, 10 May 1909.

⁴⁷ See Minutes of Aston Villa FC, 16 February 1921; Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 8 December 1926, 4 January 1927; PFA, File 35, Millwall FC Rules to Players, 1933.

⁴⁸ Minutes of FA Council, 20 December 1920; Minutes of FA Emergency Committee, 21 June-19 August 1929; Minutes of FA Finance and General Purposes Committee, 27 June 1936; Minutes of AFPTU, 24 August 1936 (AGM). Also see Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 20 March 1929.

⁴⁹ Minutes of West Ham United FC, 15 August 1933; Minutes of Huddersfield Town FC, 12 April 1939.

Securing the co-operation and compliance of football labourers was always a more complicated matter than the alternate use of carrot and stick. While it is not intended to deal with the labour aristocracy debate in any detail here, it seems evident that considerable efforts were made throughout the period to improve the perceived respectability of the player. Respectability was obviously encouraged for practical purposes: most clubs sought to avoid recalcitrant employees or 'troublemakers' who might disrupt their team-mates and damage the team's playing prospects. The correspondence files of the Aston Villa secretary indicates that that club, for one, looked to recruit the 'right type' of player. It withdrew initial inquiries for a player whom it was rumoured was difficult to manage, along with another thought to be a 'boozier', and informed one of its scouts that any prospective recruits should 'be steady and well behaved and solid in mind and body. We have a nice young well behaved lot of Boys and we should be sorry for any bad influence to get amongst them'.⁵⁰ Indeed the character of prospective employees remained a major consideration in boardroom discussions and in the correspondence between clubs.

This concern for respectability seems to have spread to professional players themselves, who were often eager to assert their middle-class credentials. Clapton Orient's H. Reason, for example, delivered a lengthy defence of the professional footballer in a newspaper article in 1909:

The idea is abroad... that the general character of the footballer is summed up in the one word, "rotter!" Let me disabuse your minds of this ridiculous belief. Footballers can be, and are, as good citizens as any other class of men. Our life is not made up of drinking, squandering our hard-earned money and betting. We have something else to live for.

A great change has come over the football world of recent years. The old habit of soaking has given way to more abstemious habits, not only because there is no place in the football world for men who cannot restrain themselves, but because men are becoming better educated.

Most of us down Hackney way take a keen interest in politics, and follow everything connected with the constituency with the keenest interest. At local elections most of us vote, and we are far readier to

⁵⁰ AV, 47/82, Ramsay to W. C. Cuff, 17 July, 14 August 1907; AV, 52/82, Ramsay to McIlroy, 19 August 1921, 1 February 1922.

discuss the social troubles of the time than spend our spare time in card-playing or drinking...⁵¹

Testimonies of this kind are of course prone to exaggeration and can hardly be used as a basis for generalisation, particularly as conflicting evidence of the problems of drinking and betting can be gleaned from club records as well as other articles written by fellow professionals and even Union representatives.⁵² Yet by 1923 Sutcliffe himself was able to draw attention to a recently acquired respectability among top level footballers:

Sometime ago the professional players were described as blackguards and guttersnipes; today they are welcomed in the company of the best society... the majority of footballers were unruly and prone to misconduct; today they deport themselves in a worthy fashion... To football clubs the doors of the best hotels were closed; now they are thrown wide open. The boozing, guzzling whiskey-swiper has gone, and the ale-can is practically unknown. The old order of shadowing a player during the week to see that he did not get locked up is merely a story to tell. Now they associate themselves with the directors and know full well how to take care of themselves.⁵³

In subsequent articles Sutcliffe reiterated these points and called for the disengagement of all those players whose conduct was below the required standard of behaviour.⁵⁴ The extent to which League footballers as a whole rose to a new level of respectability remains unclear, particularly as little is still known of their broader life styles, whom they married and where they lived. Yet it is evident that the notion of the respectable footballer was employed within the League as a significant managerial strategy designed to minimise unrest by encouraging identification with the club and the employer .

2. Unionism and Labour Protest

The need to safeguard and improve the lot of professional footballers led to attempts at industrial action, though unionism, strikes and other submerged forms of labour

⁵¹ *The Red Letter*, 17 April 1909.

⁵² See the article by James Wilson in *Thomsen's Weekly News*, 24 April 1909.

⁵³ *Topical Times*, 7 April 1923.

⁵⁴ *Topical Times*, 2 February 1924.

protest. In fact, by contrast with other sportsmen, football players were relatively successful at establishing a permanent union organisation, which, with the exception of 1915-18, functioned from 1907 until the end of the period. This section will not attempt an analysis of the union's development *per se*, as the work of Dabscheck, Mason, Vamplew and Harding have already done this adequately.⁵⁵ Rather, it will examine the nature of the union's changing relationship with the clubs and the League Management Committee and seek to evaluate its influence in structuring labour relations in the Football League.

In general, the aims of the Association Football Players' Union formed in December 1907 were consistent with those of other trade unions of the period, which acted simultaneously as friendly societies, providing welfare and financial assistance, and as trade societies, seeking to negotiate improved working conditions for their members.⁵⁶ Hence one arm of the Union's functions involved giving legal aid and assistance to players, helping members and their families in financial need and assisting transfer-listed or disengaged players in finding employment.⁵⁷ However, the Union's primary objective was undoubtedly to establish freedom of contract for players and abolish the maximum wage. Its self proclaimed intention was 'to promote and protect the interests of the members by endeavouring to come to amicable arrangements with the governing football authorities with a view to abolishing all restrictions which affect the social and financial position of players, and to safeguard their rights at all times'.⁵⁸ It would thus be wrong to assume, as Sutcliffe's prejudiced account does, that relations between the Union on one side, and the League and the FA on the other, were adversarial from the beginning.⁵⁹ Indeed, the FA in particular, as well as certain club directors, were initially seen by the Union as allies in their quest to abolish the wage limit. At its first annual meeting in December 1908 it was resolved that 'The Players' Union cordially support the Council of the FA in their efforts to procure the

⁵⁵ Dabscheck, 'Defensive Manchester'; Mason, *Association Football*, pp. 110-17; Vamplew, *Pay Up*, chapter 15; Harding, *Good of the Game*.

⁵⁶ Philip S. Bagwell, *Industrial Relations*, London, 1974, p. 31; Noel Whiteside, 'Social Welfare and Industrial Relations' in C. J. Wrigley (ed.), *A History of British Industrial Relations, Volume 2: 1914-1939*, Brighton, 1987.

⁵⁷ PFA, File 11, Rules of Association Football Players' Union, 1908, points 5, 6 and 7.

⁵⁸ Dabscheck, 'Defensive Manchester', p. 234.

⁵⁹ See Sutcliffe *et al.*, *Football League*, p. 118. For a similar view see Young, *History of British Football*, p. 220.

deletion of the wages rule'.⁶⁰ Moreover, the Union established close contact with a number of the most prominent opponents of the maximum wage. Manchester United's chairman J. H. Davies was appointed president of the Union and John Bentley, League president, FA vice-president and a director of United, was evidently influential at a less formal level in the initial phase. Other prime movers in the campaigns of the 1900s against the maximum wage, such as Aston Villa's Fred Rinder, Liverpool's John McKenna and Newcastle United's John Cameron (the latter two also members of the League Management Committee) became vice-presidents of the Union, while Manchester City chairman W. A. Wilkinson was the first legal adviser.⁶¹

Recognition of the Union by the football authorities was therefore relatively quick and unproblematic. By March 1908 the FA had officially consented to the Union's formation and 'expressed their wish that it would be a success'. It had also sanctioned a match between League champions Manchester United and Newcastle United in aid of the Union's benevolent fund.⁶² However, such recognition was not unconditional but dependent upon definite limits being placed on Union activity. Firstly, this involved the monitoring and, to a certain extent, the control of Union finances. The Union was required to submit its balance sheet annually to the FA while the allocation of funds was subject to a veto by the governing body. In particular, the FA became determined to financially separate the Union's welfare activities from its organisational work and hence in 1910, and again in 1912, stepped in to prohibit the transfer of Union money from the latter's benevolent fund to its general fund.⁶³ Control could also be exercised over the Union's fund-raising activities. In 1912 the League Management Committee supported the FA's action by withdrawing permission for a benefit match to be played between the English and Scottish Union; and in 1921 it was similarly decided that the Union's benevolent finances were not sufficiently depleted to warrant a fund-raising match.⁶⁴ These attempts to impose

⁶⁰ Minutes of AFPU, 15 December 1908 (AGM).

⁶¹ Minutes of AFPU, 23 December 1907, 27 January 1908; Harding, *Good of the Game*, p. 45.

⁶² Green, *Football Association*, p. 411.

⁶³ Minutes of AFPU, 21 March 1910, 14 October 1912.

⁶⁴ Minutes of Football League, 22-23 October 1912; Minutes of AFPU, 29 April 1912; Minutes of AFPTU, 5 December 1921.

restrictions on the use of Union funds were in keeping with the implications of the Osborne Judgement of 1909, and even the subsequent 1913 Trade Union Act, which to varying degrees restricted the functions of unions to the immediate protection of their members and discounted their involvement in broader political or legislative issues.⁶⁵

A second and more important limit on Union recognition was the need to conform with the rules and procedures of the football authorities. Hence when the Union threatened in early 1909 to take legal action against clubs for the recovery of wages as well as compensation under the Workmen's Compensation Act without their permission, the FA decided to withdraw recognition 'until they are satisfied that the Union is prepared to carry on its operations in accordance with FA rules'.⁶⁶ Supporters of the FA pointed out that procedures for arbitration and settlement of such disputes existed within the laws of the parent body and that the players were therefore bringing themselves into conflict with an intermediary rather than quarreling directly with their employers.⁶⁷ Such arguments held little sway with the Union Committee, which rejected 'the opinion that a football player forfeits a common legal right on entering into a professional engagement with a football club'.⁶⁸ For one of the Union's leaders, Billy Meredith, the issue was essentially about autonomy:

the Football Association is composed of autocrats who demand that we shall surrender our rights of citizenship. We must not go to law without first obtaining their permission, they themselves clinging like limpets to the privilege of suspending and punishing us... without allowing us to appear and plead our own cause before them. What [is] the good of belonging to a union that is only recognised provided it observes the rules and practices of the FA.⁶⁹

The 1909 dispute highlighted a further limit on recognition relating to strike action. In May the leaders of the Player's Union agreed to affiliate to the General Federation of Trade Unions (GFTU) and inserted a strike clause in its rules whereby members

⁶⁵ Henry Pelling, *A History of British Trade Unionism*, Fourth Edition, London, 1987, pp. 120-22.

⁶⁶ Minutes of FA Council, 8 March 1909.

⁶⁷ For expressions of this opinion see *Athletic News*, 15 March, 10 May 1909.

⁶⁸ *Athletic News*, 22 February 1909.

⁶⁹ Quoted in Mason, *Association Football*, p. 132.

would receive £1 per week strike pay if it was considered necessary to withdraw their labour.⁷⁰ Administrators and club directors argued that such a clause was impracticable and unnecessary for League footballers, who benefited from yearly contracts and were not subject to the usual risks of trade and fluctuating wages. Indeed William Pickford was not alone in pointing out that signing an agreement actually implied a moral duty *not* to strike. In addition to this, there was a diffuse fear that footballers might be called to strike in support of fellow GFTU workers.⁷¹ Football League representatives were particularly vociferous in their objection to the involvement of the GFTU in the dispute. According to Bentley, 'the League clubs will never agree to players being connected with a union or an organisation of any sort in which there is a strike clause'.⁷² In response to pressure throughout the late summer and early autumn to secede from the GFTU, the Union leadership continued to resist, even informing the FA that 'the power to withdraw members or to strike is not conceded by the Federation but by the Trade Disputes Act of 1906'. Yet eventually the pressure proved too much. A ballot of members in late October resulted in a majority of 470-172 voting to disaffiliate from the GFTU and 'in the interests of peace and harmony' the Union tendered its resignation.⁷³ Only then was the Union formally recognised again by the FA and the League. A similar policy was adopted by the League in early 1919 towards a London based Professional Football Players' and Trainers' Union, which had met and established preliminary contacts with mainstream union officials. At a joint meeting of players and officials, McKenna explicitly rejected the new union in the following terms:

So long as you are organising along Trade Union lines the League cannot meet your representatives... [there is] a vast difference between football players and trade unionists. We will not accept a players' union on trade union principles and whose strength lies in the strike clause.

The London union was then immediately disbanded and its members joined a revived version of the old pre-war Union, which subsequently committed itself to 'deal with

⁷⁰ Minutes of AFPU, 7 May 1909.

⁷¹ See editorials and articles by Pickford and Sutcliffe in *Athletic News*, 11, 18 October 1909.

⁷² *Athletic News*, 11 October 1909.

⁷³ Minutes of AFPU, 7 October, 2 November 1909 (AGM); Further Report of FA Officers, 1 December 1909.

the League on proper constitutional lines' without resorting to strike threats or links with the wider union movement.⁷⁴

The League and the FA therefore sought to contain the Union's activities and secure its identification with groups within the football industry rather than outside. For this reason League officials and supporters placed a great deal of emphasis on the rhetoric of friendship and loyalty and eschewed references to conventional employer-employee relationships. During the 1909 dispute, for example, *Athletic News* continually referred to the GFTU as 'the third party' and advised players that it was their 'first duty' to be loyal to the FA:

If the professional were an ordinary workman, a craftsman or a mechanic, we should be the first to say "Stand by your Federation". We have no doubt that the Federation has done and will render much excellent service to the cause of industry, and unionism has accomplished much in its own world. But that world does not happen to be football'.⁷⁵

Similarly, in 1919 the paper's London correspondent reminded the League player that 'his true friends are in football' and went on to talk of the need for mutual loyalty, harmony and 'friendly cooperation' between the Union and the League.⁷⁶ Antagonism and opposition to League decisions were rejected out of hand as inappropriate responses for a players' association. The Union was therefore charged with disloyalty when it encouraged its members to defy League instructions by wearing Union badges during matches. Similarly, when the Union issued a statement in April 1915 criticising alterations of League rules, the Management Committee responded by declaring that the Union had 'adopted a policy and attitude calculated to hinder us in our purpose to keep the game going and complete our Competition' and, furthermore, was 'indisposed to be of any practical assistance to the clubs and the governing bodies'.⁷⁷ The Union was thus tolerated as long as it remained acquiescent; working alongside the League rather than against it.

⁷⁴ Report of Football League SGM in *Athletic News*, 20 January 1919.

⁷⁵ *Athletic News*, 18 October 1909.

⁷⁶ *Athletic News*, 13 January 1919.

⁷⁷ Sutcliffe *et al.*, *Football League*, pp. 119, 122.

Notwithstanding national recognition by the League and FA, the Players' Union continued to face some resistance at club level. Although there is a lack of concrete evidence, it appears that certain clubs were regarded as staunchly anti-Union during much of the inter-war period. It has been suggested that the influence of powerful individuals such as Everton's chairman William Cuff and managers like Herbert Chapman of Arsenal and Major Frank Buckley of Wolverhampton Wanderers may explain the limited involvement of these clubs in Union activity.⁷⁸ Indeed the Union minutes note that on one occasion Chapman actually dictated a reply to a letter sent by the Union secretary Jimmy Fay to the Arsenal captain which had asked for an explanation of his team-mates' refusal to join. Fay also found himself effectively barred from visiting certain League grounds to talk to non-Union players and considered it 'an insult' that in some cases he had not even received a reply to his correspondence.⁷⁹ Cases of the victimisation of Union members were also recorded, especially during the nadir of membership in the mid to late 1920s. It was recognised in 1928 that 'players seem afraid to be seen collecting Union subscriptions' although it remained difficult to prove that directors were specifically targeting Union collectors or members. In one case the Union threatened legal action against the directors of Luton Town, who had allegedly suspended and cancelled the agreements of a number of Union men without justifiable explanations. Yet while these instances 'savoured of victimisation' there is no evidence of the Union taking the matter further.⁸⁰

In many industries union recognition was rapidly followed by the establishment of machinery for collective bargaining and resolving disputes between unions and employers. But in spite of prompting from the Players' Union, formal bargaining procedures were consistently resisted by the FA initially, and then the League. From its formation the Union had proposed that it should be entitled to representation on the FA Council and in 1909 advocated the creation of a Wages and Claims Board, consisting of an equal representation from both the FA and the Union, to adjudicate

⁷⁸ Harding, *Good of the Game*, pp. 172-173; Walsh, *Dixie Dean*, pp. 46-47. According to Walsh (p. 46), Everton 'thought it was unnecessary for its players to join the union' but there is no further explanation of how the club's attitude worked in practice.

⁷⁹ Minutes of AFPTU, 9 October 1933; 14 December 1931.

⁸⁰ Minutes of AFPTU, 17 December 1928 (AGM); 13 December 1926.

on the claims of players against clubs.⁸¹ Not surprisingly, proposals of this kind involving direct Union influence on decision-making were rejected and the Union was excluded from formal involvement in the settling of players' disputes. Instead, disputes between individual players and clubs - from suspensions, dismissals and unpaid wages to applications for reductions in transfer fees - were normally referred to the League Management Committee and ultimately to an Appeals Committee consisting of three FA Council members. Unlike in Rugby League, where the newly-formed Players' Union was briefly represented during the early 1920s on the Board of Appeal, the football Union had no judicial power or influence at any stage in the Football League's procedures.⁸² In fact, as we shall see in the following section, it was only to resolve disputes arising out of compensation for players' injuries that anything approaching permanent and formal arrangements were established between the League and the Union.

Negotiations between the League Management Committee and the Players' Union over the fundamental issues of wages, contracts and conditions were largely informal and *ad hoc*. There were no football equivalents to the conciliation and arbitration boards which developed across a broad scope of industries during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁸³ Rather, the Union was forced to take the initiative in arranging specific meetings between the two bodies, or more often, deputations by a Union sub-committee to Management Committee meetings - a situation which itself emphasised the subordinate status attached to the Union. As no arrangements existed for periodic or annual meetings between the League and the Union, there were long periods in which formal negotiations ceased. Before 1923 meetings occurred on a fairly regular basis: according to Sutcliffe 'the Union representatives had always found the Management Committee of the Football League prepared to receive them and to reasonably and generously consider any proposals submitted to them'.⁸⁴ As Table 6.1 indicates, however, there were no formal meetings at all between 1923 and

⁸¹ PFA, File 11, Rules of the Association Football Players' Union, 1908; Minutes of AFPTU, 1 April 1908; PFA, File 6, Broomfield to James Ashcroft, 24 March 1909; *Athletic News*, 30 August 1909.

⁸² Moorhouse, *A People's Game*, p. 136.

⁸³ Van Gore, 'Rank-and-File Dissent' in Chris Wrigley (ed.), *A History of British Industrial Relations, Volume 1: 1875-1914*, Massachusetts, 1982, pp. 64-67; Bagwell, *Industrial Relations*, chapter 5.

⁸⁴ *Athletic News*, 7 March 1921.

1937. This can partly be explained by a shift in Union policy away from attempts to effect major legislative change in the rules governing transfers and wages and towards an emphasis on internal reorganisation and the improvement of membership levels. However by 1929 the Union had resumed its pressure on the League to consider rule changes and it was primarily the obstinacy of the Management Committee which precluded collective bargaining on the major issues of dispute. Twice in 1930 and again in 1933 the Management Committee refused requests to meet a Union deputation and on several other occasions the agenda of Committee meetings were evidently not flexible enough to incorporate late Union requests.⁸⁵ As Sutcliffe wrote in his Jubilee history, 'the Management Committee... always replied that as they had no intention of suggesting to the clubs any alteration in the existing rules on the lines outlined by the union no useful purpose could be served by a conference on the subject'.⁸⁶ When Preston finally acceded to a joint meeting in April 1938 to 'hear the case of the players' there was considerable anticipation within the Union that this would lead to further negotiations but by the following February the Union still felt itself deliberately ostracised by the League. At an extraordinary meeting of southern members Fay again called for Union representation on football's governing bodies and suggested a return to collective bargaining: 'it was time players got together with employers, as was the case in other large business concerns, to discuss all financial matters'.⁸⁷ Eventually dissatisfaction with the League's obdurate attitude led to the decision in August 1939 to bypass the Management Committee entirely and negotiate directly with club chairmen as 'it was felt that the players... would be given a more sympathetic hearing'.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Minutes of AFPTU, 10 February, 10 November 1930, 9 October 1933.

⁸⁶ Sutcliffe *et al.*, *Football League*, p. 125.

⁸⁷ Minutes of AFPTU, 20 April 1938; 27 February 1939 (EGM).

⁸⁸ Minutes of AFPTU, 21 August 1939 (AGM).

Table 6.1 Recorded Meetings Between Representatives of the Players' Union and the Football League, 1908-39

Year	No. of Meetings
1910	2
1911	1
1912	2
1914	3
1919	2
1920	1
1921	1
1922	3
1938	1
1939	1

Note: There were no meetings in those years omitted.
Source: Minutes of AFPTU; Minutes of Football League.

Strained relations between League and Union officials undoubtedly contributed to the absence of mutual co-operation. The first major incident occurred in 1912 when the Management Committee accused Union secretary Syd Owen of deliberately misleading them over gaining FA permission for the proposed benefit match with the Scottish Union. To add to the ill feeling, Owen had also written a letter to the press which contained 'a serious reflection on the honour and honesty of the League Management Committee'. The League responded by demanding an official apology and refusing to recognise Owen as the Union secretary, which in turn forced the Union Committee to disassociate itself from Owen's remarks, censure him and thus prompt his resignation.⁸⁹ A year later the League could publicly acknowledge that the appointment of Owen's successor, Harry Newbould, had contributed to an improvement in relations between the two bodies⁹⁰, but by 1920 these had again deteriorated. In his annual report, Newbould complained of the 'austere attitude of the Football League', particularly its secretary Tom Charnley, and it was resolved that the Union viewed

with dissatisfaction the tendency of the Football League to ignore the official, and other, communication forwarded in connection with the alleged grievances of players, and requests that in every case prompt replies should be forwarded to the secretary of the Union in order that a satisfactory relationship can be maintained.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Minutes of Football League, 22-23 October, 15 November 1912; Minutes of AFPU, 2 December 1912, 10 February 1913. Owen eventually resigned in February the following year and took up a coaching job in Budapest.

⁹⁰ Minutes of Football League, 26 May 1913 (AGM).

⁹¹ Minutes of AFPTU, 23 August 1920 (AGM).

Additionally there was a feeling that certain League representatives, led by the ubiquitous Sutcliffe, were attempting to undermine the position of the Union. In 1923 the Union executive publicly condemned an article by Sutcliffe in *Topical Times* which they believed 'was written with the object of damaging the status of the Union'; and it even considered a libel action against Sutcliffe and the co-authors of *The Story of the Football League* for a passage allegedly accusing the Union of dishonesty.⁹²

Union membership levels fluctuated significantly pre-1914, from a reported high of over 1,300 in December 1908 to 510 by September 1910, before a further increase to 853 in April 1912 and a subsequent dip to 467 a year later. However, Football League players accounted for only about two-thirds of the total registrations while approximately a quarter of League clubs were unable to contribute a single Union member.⁹³ While unions generally underwent rapid growth during the First World War, the Players' Union was forced by circumstances to disband in October 1915 and was only revived in January 1920. Yet it too benefited from the immediate post-war boom, and more specifically from the wage rises of 1920, to record a membership of 1,174 in 1921, increasing to 1,481 by 1922. And by this point, of course, the expansion of the Football League to four divisions meant the Union had become a virtual monopoly of League professionals. The general slide in union membership from 1920, though slightly delayed, was equally pronounced in the Players' Union, chiefly due to the wage reductions of April 1922. By February of the following year Newbould had to report a 'falling off' in membership to 994 from 39 clubs and appealed to first and second division players particularly to renew their support⁹⁴: the appeal was evidently unsuccessful as membership slumped to a low of 398 in 1924. Yet despite the depression and the overall decline in union membership during the late 1920s and early 1930s, a successful membership drive led to a growth of over 60 per cent to 1,040 registered members by 1932. From this point membership rose

⁹² Minutes of AFPTU, 12 February 1923; 23 January 1939. The offending *Topical Times* article, entitled 'Is Players' Union a Useless Body?', was printed in the 10 February 1923 issue.

⁹³ The first figure is from Mason, *Association Football*, p. 111; the others are taken from the Union's subscription registers tabulated in Vamplew, *Pay Up*, Table 15.1, p. 248. The inter-war membership figures are recorded in the annual reports and the minutes, though it must be remembered that membership could vary significantly at different stages of the season.

⁹⁴ Minutes of AFPTU, 12 February 1923.

gradually to nearly 1,400 by 1937 and then more rapidly, so that in April 1939 the Players' Union could claim 1,850 Football League members and an extra 80 or so forced out of the League by excessive transfer fees.⁹⁵ Moreover, by now all but a handful of clubs were represented in the Union, normally by at least half a dozen players. Yet on balance the Union remained numerically a fairly weak and marginal organisation during this period. It could only confidently claim to represent the majority of League footballers for short spells in 1908-09, 1921-22 and then from the mid-1930s. For the rest of the period union density rarely topped 40 per cent and even dipped to below 20 per cent in the mid-1920s.

In certain ways the labour market and the nature of employment in the Football League were clearly incompatible with strong union organisation. Though employment for most players was guaranteed for at least a season and was thus more secure than in trades like docking and building, labour mobility within the League was nonetheless substantial as the importance of the transfer market increased between the wars.⁹⁶ As playing-staffs constantly changed so it became more difficult to ensure long-term stability in Union membership, especially when collectors, the focus of union organisation within clubs, moved. This could produce erratic membership levels from year to year and, in extreme cases, the Union could lose a club's entire membership almost overnight, as happened with Aston Villa in 1938/39.⁹⁷ Careers, moreover, were relatively short - lasting perhaps ten to fifteen years if the player was particularly lucky but generally much less - and thus the Players' Union could rarely rely on the type of 'permanent employees' who were crucial to the growth and stability of many other unions in this period.⁹⁸ Another major problem was that, in common with other professional sports, the inherent pressures of competition could lead to divisions among players both within and between clubs. One of the Union's perennial headaches during the inter-war years was its failure to attract players associated with the more wealthy and successful clubs: a particularly ironic situation

⁹⁵ Minutes of AFPTU, 7 April 1939.

⁹⁶ H. A. Clegg, Alan Fox and A. F. Thompson, *A History of British Trade Unions since 1889, Volume 1: 1889-1910*, Oxford, 1964, p. 88.

⁹⁷ Harding, *Good of the Game*, pp. 170-71; *Manchester Evening News*, 1 March 1939.

⁹⁸ Dabscheck, 'Defensive Manchester', pp. 235-36; Clegg *et al.*, *British Trade Unions*, pp. 87-88. For data on career lengths in the Football League during the 1890s and early 1900s, see Vamplew, *Pay Up*, chapter 14.

as the Union had been founded on the initiative and endeavour of stars like Billy Meredith, Charlie Roberts and Colin Veitch. The Union was aggrieved that some players 'connected chiefly with the richer clubs... take a very selfish view, and have no consideration whatever for their Brother Professionals', a statement borne out by the fact that in 1936 only 271 of its total League membership of 1,250 were drawn from first division clubs. By contrast, the second division could boast 480 and the third division south had 413 members.⁹⁹ This lack of involvement at the elite level may have been because such players considered themselves reasonably well-paid and well-treated and thus saw no need to join a union. But it can also be partly explained by the individual nature of contract negotiations and other forms of bargaining. Each player's agreement with his club was conducted independently of his fellow workers and remained, theoretically at least, confidential. This probably encouraged selfishness and even envy at times; it could certainly preclude the development of solidarity among players. For example, when Alex James refused to re-sign for Arsenal at the end of the 1930/31 season, he did so not 'to right the wrongs of the oppressed brothers of my profession' but to convince the club to increase the terms offered. For James, 'football - off the field,... of course - must always be each man for himself. And professional footballers didn't invent that rule'.¹⁰⁰

Many contemporaries certainly believed that professional footballers lacked collective strength. *Athletic News* remained convinced that 'The footballer is not naturally inclined to be an ardent and staunch trade unionist' on the very eve of the threatened players' strike in August 1909.¹⁰¹ Charlie Roberts, a member of the Union executive, was also critical of the fundamental apathy and docility he had witnessed amongst League players:

I know of no class of workpeople who are less able to look after themselves than footballers; they are like a lot of sheep. A representative from the Union could go and speak to them on the why and wherefore they should join the Union, and they would immediately decide to join.

⁹⁹ Minutes of AFPTU, 6 February 1933; 24 August 1936 (AGM).

¹⁰⁰ Quoted in Harding, *Alex James*, p. 136. James was already in receipt of the maximum wage but his contract with Selfridges had ended, bringing his salary back to the basic £8 per week. He was therefore effectively asking Arsenal to make illegal payments. Eventually, however, Selfridges made a new improved offer and James re-signed for Arsenal in time for the start of the new season.

¹⁰¹ *Athletic News*, 30 August 1909.

Two minutes after a manager could go and say a few words to them, and then they decide not to join.¹⁰²

Conventional forms of collective action like strikes were therefore extremely rare. The only major example took place 1909, significantly at the beginning of a period of widespread labour unrest and soaring strike activity in which vast numbers of unskilled workers became organised for the first time. The events of that year indicated the difficulties and risks involved in attempting an all-out national strike.¹⁰³ The FA had ordered both officials and rank-and-file members to resign from the Union by the beginning of July or have their registrations cancelled and those who failed to do so also suffered the loss of possible summer pay and prospective benefits. Hence players had a great deal to lose by remaining defiant and the majority - as many as 800 of a 1,200 membership according to the FA - had complied with the parent body's wishes by the deadline.¹⁰⁴

The letters received by Herbert Broomfield, the Union secretary, over the critical months of May, June and July provide a clear insight into the attitudes of the membership. Most resigned reluctantly: though they supported the Union and its demands, they were not convinced that they had the collective strength to withstand a protracted dispute. An Oldham Athletic player, for instance, wrote to Broomfield declaring that he was prepared to 'stand out' but thought it useless to do so alone: 'one in a team will not do much good'.¹⁰⁵ Jack Carr of Newcastle United similarly believed that the Union's case was doomed to failure because 'the players won't stick together and a handful's no good whatever'. Although Broomfield tried to convince him to cancel his resignation, Carr was unable to see 'why I or a few should risk our livelihood for the sake of a lot of football players who haven't pluck enough to fight for themselves'.¹⁰⁶ Self-interest was a clear motivation for Carr's seven team-mates and many others who broke with the union to protect their arranged benefits.

¹⁰² Quoted in Mason, *Association Football*, p. 116.

¹⁰³ James Hinton, *Labour and Socialism: A History of the British Labour Movement, 1867-1974*, Brighton, 1983, pp. 83-95. For detailed accounts of the 1909 crisis see Dabscheck, 'Man or a Puppet?'; 'Defensive Manchester', pp. 237-41; Harding, *Good of the Game*, chapters 7-9; Tischler, *Footballers and Businessmen*, chapter 6.

¹⁰⁴ Minutes of FA Council, 10 July 1909.

¹⁰⁵ PFA, File 6, H. Butterworth to Broomfield, 1909, otherwise undated.

¹⁰⁶ PFA, File 7, Jack Carr to Broomfield, 29 June, 2 July 1909.

Additionally, the numerous requests for guidance and information on whether team colleagues had resigned illustrates the difficulties of collective action in the close season when players were necessarily scattered across the country.¹⁰⁷ In view of these circumstances it is hardly surprising that only Manchester United withdrew their labour collectively, though other 'militant' sides like Sunderland and Newcastle United agreed to rejoin the Union in time for the start of the season. Even so, Broomfield still believed that the Union was 'absolutely assured of success' if 'a few players in a few of the Principal Clubs' stood out for a fortnight and remained convinced 'that every man was a Unionist at heart, and would belong to us if no coercion was used to make them act differently'.¹⁰⁸ Eventually, however, a compromise was reached on the eve of the new season which saved the Union from testing Sutcliffe's belief that players would be unable to last even a month-long strike.¹⁰⁹ After 1909, the Union's general retreat from conflict with the authorities and the effective outlawing of strike action by the latter diminished the likelihood of another national dispute. According to Charles Buchan, a strike had been called by Union delegates at the end of the 1919/20 season, but this position soon became untenable when several teams re-signed with their clubs *en bloc*. Similarly, the possibility of striking in response to the wage cuts of 1922 was briefly debated at that year's annual meeting but the consensus was that the risk remained too high, one delegate pointing out that, as in 1909 and 1920, players 'would not stand out in the close season'.¹¹⁰

The absence of industry-wide strikes and other combative forms of industrial action does not mean that labour relations in the Football League were stable and free of conflict. First of all, collective action and mutual support among players, though difficult to uncover, did take place in spite of the individualism encouraged by employers. When Sheffield United suspended Kay in 1902 his fellow workers contributed, against the Committee's wishes, to a common fund to ensure that he

¹⁰⁷ See PFA, File 7, J. Johnson to Broomfield, 22 June 1909; W. McCombie to Broomfield, 29 June 1909; File 8, Carr to Broomfield, 2 July 1909; Broomfield to A. Young, 5 July 1909.

¹⁰⁸ PFA, File 8, Broomfield to A. Collins, 24 July 1909; Broomfield to Harry Mainman, 1 September 1909.

¹⁰⁹ *Athletic News*, 8 March 1909.

¹¹⁰ Buchan, *Lifetime in Football*, p. 64; Minutes of AFPTU, 20 August 1922 (AGM).

received his normal income. In 1920 nine first team players at the same club joined together to send a letter of protest to the Committee against the 'preferential treatment' given to the club captain over his benefit match. While this may be interpreted as a collective show of jealousy as much as unity, it did persuade the management to grant benefits which had previously been refused to a number of the protesters.¹¹¹ More often, however, unrest was expressed through individual and submerged forms of protest. The most common example involved contract disputes where players would delay signing in the hope of gaining an improved offer. While it is true that average players especially were often in a weak position in such disputes, Korr is wrong to assume that 'pre-war players had been conditioned to accept wage terms'.¹¹² The absence of contract negotiations at West Ham until 1933 does appear to be an exception to the rule: the records of other League clubs indicate that bargaining was relatively common and reluctantly accepted by most directors as part of the signing-on process. Often the club would refuse to make improved offers, as was the case at Sheffield United in 1930 and at Arsenal during Alex James' close season 'strike' a year later, and in some cases players refusing to sign-on risked being placed on the transfer-list.¹¹³ The Aston Villa board was similarly reluctant to accede to demands for extra wages or benefits, as Frank Barson and F. Moss were both to discover in 1922.¹¹⁴ Yet many players *were* able to successfully negotiate better terms. West Ham agreed to pay four of its players up to an extra £1 per week for the 1935-36 season; Raynor, Smith, Oxley and Pickering similarly secured amended terms at Sheffield United in 1931. One player, Partridge, actually convinced the United Committee to pay him a basic wage of £6 per week after it had previously decided not to re-engage him at all and put him up for sale.¹¹⁵

Grievances might also be expressed through absenteeism, go-slows and other forms of non-cooperation or dissent. Potentially the most powerful weapon that footballers possessed was simply the refusal to play, although again it was generally only the

¹¹¹ Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 7 October 1902; 25 February, 2 March 1920.

¹¹² Korr, *West Ham United*, p. 174.

¹¹³ Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 30 April 1930; Harding, *Alex James*, pp. 135-39. Bennett suffered the latter fate at Walsall in 1935, Minutes of Walsall FC, 28 May, 2 July 1935.

¹¹⁴ Minutes of Aston Villa FC, 2 May, 13 June, 21 November 1922.

¹¹⁵ Minutes of West Ham United FC, 2, 9 April 1935; Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 9 May, 29 July 1931; 7, 16 May 1928.

most talented who could afford to aggravate their employers in this way. When two of Aston Villa's senior players, the aforementioned Barson and Clem Stephenson, declined to play in a League match because of a dispute concerning residency outside Birmingham, they were initially suspended for a fortnight by the club but eventually achieved a board climb down. Similar action by Christopher Buckley over a benefit dispute proved less successful: he was forced to apologise for his action and fall in line with the club's arrangements.¹¹⁶ Historians of industrial relations have recognised that such examples of indiscipline can reasonably be interpreted as conscious forms of protest. Hence it is not implausible to speculate, as Mason does, that Stephen Bloomer's persistent insobriety and neglect of training during 1901 may have been an individual response to the restrictive maximum wage rules passed that year.¹¹⁷

Perhaps the best example of what might be called industrial sabotage in League football involved 'playing for one's papers' - the practice of intentionally playing badly in order to get a transfer. It is hard to know how widespread this was, though the press seemed to regard it as something of a phenomenon for much of the period.¹¹⁸ Certainly, Jimmy Seed noted that it was not uncommon in the 1930s for a player to suddenly lose form if his transfer request had been rejected and the *Sunday Express* in 1931 similarly exposed what it referred to as the 'scandal' of directorates 'tapping' players at other clubs by offering them inducements, usually through a third party, to play badly and thus facilitate a transfer.¹¹⁹ One obvious instance, involving Sheffield United's Fazackerley, can be gleaned from club records. Fazackerley had evidently been 'unsettled' for some time at the club and in October 1920 put in a transfer request which was refused. In response the player not only stopped training but generated considerable discontent among both team-mates and supporters by 'not doing his share of the work' during matches. Not surprisingly, the Committee chose

¹¹⁶ Minutes of Aston Villa FC, 14, 22 September, 16 November 1920; *Topical Times*, 2 October 1920. On Buckley's dispute with Aston Villa, see chapter 5.

¹¹⁷ Van Gore, 'Rank-and-File Dissent', p. 60; Tony Mason, "'Our Stephen and Our Harold': Edwardian Footballers as Local Heroes' in Richard Holt, J. A. Mangan and Pierre Lanfranchi (eds.), *European Heroes: Myth, Identity, Sport*, London, 1996, p. 80.

¹¹⁸ See *Athletic News*, 4 December 1911; Sutcliffe's comments in *Topical Times*, 17 March 1928. Also see Tischler, *Footballers and Businessmen*, p. 106.

¹¹⁹ Seed, *Jimmy Seed Story*, p. 118; *Sunday Express*, 25 January 1931.

to transfer 'with reluctance' a player who had become a disruptive influence and by November Fazackerley had moved on to Everton.¹²⁰

3. Welfare and Training

Welfare provision in the Football League at the beginning of the century can be described as rudimentary and sporadic. Without government or League intervention, there were no legal obligations upon club employers to provide for the sick or injured player who 'ran risks which often cost him his job and his capacity to earn a living'.¹²¹ In practice, however, many clubs did make certain financial and medical arrangements to look after players who found themselves in such unfortunate circumstances. In minor cases, the player received his normal wage until he was declared fit; part-timers would likewise be paid for earnings lost owing to a footballing accident. Medical treatment was also necessary to get a man fit and playing again as quickly as possible. Hence clubs increasingly employed their own doctors, masseurs and other specialists to treat injuries and, with few exceptions, paid the costs of surgery and convalescence. West Ham were one club which established specific arrangements with a local hospital for treatment of its players. Others might send employees to hospitals specialising in football injuries, like the renowned Matlock House in Manchester, which was run by Mr Allison, a director of the City club, and was widely recommended to clubs by Bentley in his dual role as League president and *Athletic News* editor.¹²² This concern with the physical well-being of players was sometimes extended to the organisation of recuperative visits to seaside resorts. This was especially popular with the Sheffield United Committee, which agreed to send Alf Common to Skegness for two weeks during the summer of 1902 and gave Lewis a similar fortnight's holiday on medical advice the following season. It is unclear whether this practice was followed at other, particularly poorer, clubs but at United it certainly lasted well into the 1930s.¹²³

¹²⁰ Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 15 March, 13, 20 October, 2, 10 November 1920.

¹²¹ Sutcliffe *et al.*, *Football League*, p. 126.

¹²² See Minutes of West Ham United FC, 31 January 1933; M. Randal Roberts, 'A Footballer's Hospital', *Windsor Magazine*, 1904, pp. 511-16; John Hutchinson, *The Football Industry*, Glasgow, 1982, p. 40.

¹²³ Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 20 August 1902; 11 March 1903. Also see Minutes, 9, 16, 23 November 1932.

In common with many employers, League clubs preferred informal welfare arrangements which allowed them greater discrimination and control. Only as the costs and the scale of activities rose did they consider more institutionalised and formal schemes designed to financially protect both themselves and their employees against the constant threat of injury.¹²⁴ Aston Villa had evidently taken out an insurance policy against accidents to players even before joining the League and West Bromwich Albion had its players insured with Lloyds from the early 1900s.¹²⁵ These initiatives may have been partly prompted by the introduction of government measures such as the Employers' Liability Act of 1880 and the Workmen's Compensation Acts of 1897 and 1900, which, under certain conditions, made employers liable to compensate workers injured in the course of their employment. In fact, in 1902 the Football League took legal advice on the application of these laws to employers of football labour but were told that no such liability was attached to member clubs.¹²⁶ However, the authorities, this time the FA, were forced to seek counsel's opinion again following the introduction of a wider-ranging Workmen's Compensation Act in 1906. The original decision was reversed: professional footballers were deemed 'workmen' and thus entitled to compensation under the new Act. League officials and club directors envisaged being inundated with claims for compensation and it was this fear, rather than any emerging sense of moral responsibility for players, which convinced them to seek more comprehensive insurance cover.¹²⁷ The response to this was the creation in 1907 of the Football Mutual Insurance Federation (FMIF), a joint body composed of Football League, Southern League and Scottish League representatives, which attempted for the first time to provide a comprehensive, self-funding insurance scheme for clubs. Premiums began at £1 per player, subsequently reduced to 10s. in 1910/11, which were supplemented by additional levies to cover any possible loss on the season. Membership was not compulsory, but by July 1911 32 League clubs had joined, as well as 20 each from the Southern and Scottish Leagues, and in the preceding year the

¹²⁴ Hay, 'Employers and Social Policy', pp. 438-39.

¹²⁵ Mason, *Association Football*, p. 107; *Athletic News*, 6 November 1911.

¹²⁶ See Bagwell, *Industrial Relations*, chapter 10; Sutcliffe *et al.*, *Football League*, pp. 126-28.

¹²⁷ *Athletic News*, 29 April 1907; Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 1 May 1907. For details on the 1906 Act see Clegg *et al.*, *British Trade Unions*, Vol. 1, pp. 395-96.

FMIF settled 22 claims, mostly concerning Football League clubs and players.¹²⁸ Those clubs who chose not to join the FMIF generally took out private insurance policies. Sheffield United, one of the eight League members going-it-alone, insured its entire playing staff from 1908 with the Essex and Suffolk Accident Indemnity Society, and despite higher premiums of up to £3 per player, continued to make separate arrangements outside the aegis of the FMIF.¹²⁹

A further development came in 1912 and concerned the position of League footballers under the National Insurance Act of 1911, the cornerstone of the Asquith government's social legislation.¹³⁰ Following an inquiry by the League Management Committee, and evidently based on the decision in an earlier Workmen's Compensation case involving a Crystal Palace player, the National Health Insurance Commissioners ruled that 'a professional football player is employed by way of manual labour' and thus had to be insured under the Act 'whatever his remuneration'.¹³¹ In effect, the ruling extended a club's involvement with the welfare of its employees beyond the football ground. Firstly, claims under the National Insurance Act were concerned with sickness or injury outside the course of one's employment, and hence covered cases to which the Workmen's Compensation Acts did not apply. Secondly, football clubs, like other employers, were now responsible for making small weekly contributions (initially 3d. per player) along with the employee and the government, as well as arranging for players to join approved societies and stamping their insurance cards.¹³² Initially the League and most member clubs had opposed the scheme, despite the fact that it cost them little in time or money. According to *Athletic News*, 'League clubs do not take kindly to insurance': players, it was argued, were already employed throughout the year and given free medical attendance. Perhaps there was also a feeling that the Act threatened the autonomy of clubs in looking after their own players. Even after the Commissioners' verdict was given, Sheffield United recommended that the Management Committee

¹²⁸ Sutcliffe *et al.*, Football League, p. 129; *Athletic News*, 25 September 1911.

¹²⁹ Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 13 May 1908, 12 August 1909, 6 August 1912.

¹³⁰ See Eric Midwinter, *The Development of Social Welfare in Britain*, Buckingham, 1994, pp. 76-78; Derek Fraser, *The Evolution of the British Welfare State*, London, 1973, pp. 154-55; H. A. Clegg, *A History of British Trade Unions, Volume 2: 1911-1933*, Oxford, 1985, pp. 101-02.

¹³¹ Minutes of Football League, 9 September 1912 (my emphasis).

¹³² *Athletic News*, 9 September 1912.

test the opinion of the Court but was overruled by the executive body.¹³³ By 1920 League players 'who are under a contract with their clubs and are not in civil employment' were also included in the government's unemployment insurance scheme, which was funded, like health insurance, by mixed contributions from the worker, employer and state.¹³⁴

This legal clarification of the footballer as a manual worker, together with the unsatisfactory operation of the FMIF, persuaded the League in late 1912 to set up a new Football League Mutual Insurance Federation (FLMIF) 'with the object of insuring the clubs in membership with the Football League against all claims under the Workmen's Compensation Acts'.¹³⁵ Yet although the restriction to League clubs alone was intended to lessen the financial burden, the FLMIF was actually to be troubled throughout the period with financial and organisational difficulties which were never adequately resolved. The major dilemma the FLMIF faced was to keep premium rates affordable for all clubs while ensuring that sufficient funds remained to cover all claims in this notoriously unpredictable profession. Its predecessor, for example, found that its decision to reduce the premium in 1910-11 backfired owing to the number of heavy claims that season: £595 was paid out to League players alone and a further levy was needed to cover an adverse bank balance of over £200. By contrast, in the same season the Northern Rugby Union's Mutual Insurance Society was called upon to pay claims of just £46 and showed a credit balance of over £900 - a situation probably best explained not by the respective danger of the two sports but the fact that the Society only paid out for serious injuries lasting over thirteen weeks.¹³⁶

With income tight and many League clubs temporarily out of action, the FLMIF not surprisingly struggled to pay its way during most of the First World War. Twice in 1916 alone, extra levies were required from contributing clubs even though injury

¹³³ *Athletic News*, 12 August 1912; Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 3 September 1912; Minutes of Football League, 9 September 1912.

¹³⁴ Minutes of Football League, 10 November 1920; Clegg, *British Trade Unions*, Vol. 2, pp. 243-44.

¹³⁵ Sutcliffe *et al.*, *Football League*, p. 130.

¹³⁶ *Athletic News*, 25 September, 27 November 1911.

claims were 'amazingly small'.¹³⁷ After the war, the rapid growth of the League and the corresponding increase in claims continued to stretch both the finances and manpower of the FLMIF. Indeed, from September 1922 the four remaining Management Committee members were permanently co-opted onto the FLMIF Board to help deal with the increasing work involved in investigating claims.¹³⁸ In each season from 1918/19 to 1921/22 claims easily outstripped premiums and by the end of 1920/21 a considerable deficit of 1,800 was reported, necessitating a call of 21s. on each injured player. From this point the Management Committee's pressure on clubs to join the FLMIF became more explicit: not only did it 'feel that every Football League club should be in membership with the Federation' but also suggested that a portion of the general League funds should be applied to meet the FLMIF's present and future liabilities.¹³⁹ Aston Villa agreed that compulsory membership was the only way to save the Federation but Sheffield United, amongst others, continued to resist, maintaining that they were 'already insured with a reputable office' and believed the FLMIF 'ought to be self-supporting'.¹⁴⁰ Finances had deteriorated still further by 1923, leading to a further levy on members and a renewed appeal for outside clubs to join and by the end of that year McKenna and Sutcliffe were busy considering alternative schemes and approaching leading insurance companies. The latter's terms were considered exorbitant, however, and so the League constructed a new scheme to be funded by percentages of gate revenue rather than the previous system of individual premiums for each player. Clubs were now effectively compelled to join: first and second division members were to contribute one per cent, and third division south and north clubs one and a half and two per cent respectively, of the net gate from each League match (extended in 1925 to include cup-ties). It was envisaged that this would raise between £10-11,000 per annum, of which just over half was to be set aside to cover the insurance of every professional player contracted to all 88 clubs, and the remainder used for the general running of the League. With no significant opposition forthcoming - even from Sheffield United who had run into difficulties with its own

¹³⁷ *Athletic News*, 1 May, 18 December 1916.

¹³⁸ Minutes of Football League, 8 September 1922.

¹³⁹ Financial Statement of FLMIF, December 1922; Minutes of Football League, 23 October 1922.

¹⁴⁰ Minutes of Aston Villa FC, 31 October 1922; Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 25 October, 1 November 1922.

private insurance arrangements - the scheme was approved and came into operation for the 1924/25 season.¹⁴¹

The 1924 scheme also ironed out some of the anomalies which had previously existed in both club and Football League insurance schemes. Henceforth players and trainers were covered 'from the commencement of training to the end of the season', including all recognised first and second team fixtures, practice matches and training sessions.¹⁴² Clubs could no longer claim that a player injured during non-competitive football was not in fact working, as Manchester City had in 1902 following the death of one of its employees from an injury sustained in a pre-season trial match.¹⁴³ The risk of travelling to and from matches was also covered by the FLMIF. However, players on continental club tours were not included and, in fact, it was not until 1930 that the FA established a formal system for insuring all players chosen for international and representative matches, with the Scottish, Irish and Welsh FAs also agreeing to insure Football League players a year later. The FA's scheme was no doubt influenced by the serious injury sustained by Sheffield Wednesday's Marsden in an international fixture against Germany. Following a claim by Wednesday the FA paid the club £2,000 to cover the loss of the player and a further £700 'for the benefit of Marsden and his family'. All players were then systematically insured for £2,000, a sum which was doubled in 1934.¹⁴⁴ Nevertheless, some clubs evidently considered this cover inadequate, choosing to take out separate *ad hoc* policies for their international players. In 1932, for example, Sheffield United arranged accident and sickness insurance amounting to £5,000 each for Jack Pickering in an Inter-League match and Robert Barclay and Jimmy Dunne in international games.¹⁴⁵ The risk of accidents to employees away from the football field also convinced many clubs to take out extra insurance protection. West Ham arranged a policy in 1930 with the Motor Union Insurance Company covering all players and officials 'whilst on club business' but when the company denied liability for an accident to first team goalkeeper George

¹⁴¹ Football League Circular to Clubs, 31 August 1923; Minutes of Football League, 4 February, 2 June (AGM) 1924; *Athletic News*, 9 June 1924. On Sheffield United's insurance problems, see Minutes, 27 February, 12 March 1924.

¹⁴² Minutes of Football League, 2 June 1924 (AGM); *Athletic News*, 9 June 1924.

¹⁴³ Harding, *Good of the Game*, pp. 38-39.

¹⁴⁴ Green, *Football Association*, pp. 416-17; Sutcliffe *et al.*, *Football League*, pp. 131, 138-39.

¹⁴⁵ Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 28 September, 12 October 1932.

Watson three years later, the club took out a more comprehensive policy covering all activities except aviation, motor cycling and football playing.¹⁴⁶

In theory, then, an injured or sick player in the 1920s was not forced to rely on his employer's benevolence alone. As well as state health benefits, he was entitled to weekly compensation until he regained fitness or was forced to retire. Yet in practice players could often face a long and arduous struggle with the FLMIF before receiving compensation payments. While the Management Committee often portrayed itself as sympathetic to players, even exhorting them 'to trust the Committee as friends'¹⁴⁷, its chief concern was to limit the financial liability of its clubs to a minimum. The vast majority of claims were conducted on the player's behalf by the Union, and more specifically by its solicitor from 1909, Thomas Hinchcliffe. Normally an injured player would receive full wages up until the end of his contract and then compensation of 30s. (£1 before the First World War and briefly 35s. just after) but by the early 1920s Hinchcliffe and Sutcliffe, who acted as the FLMIF solicitor, had established a standard procedure for settling claims by lump sum payments. In certain cases the FLMIF chose to contest the player's claim by denying liability for the injury or reducing, and even stopping, compensation payments when it considered the player had recovered. In 1922 it advised every club 'to take an interest in its injured players and to see that there is no malingering' but, despite such concerns, liability was eventually admitted in most cases, sometimes on the eve of county court decisions.¹⁴⁸ Even when the player's case seemed less convincing the FLMIF was generally forced or persuaded to make some form of payment. It was claimed that a Bournemouth player, for example, had played 11 League matches after an alleged injury without complaint and also that his position as a licensee and his ability to drive a car proved that 'he had not suffered any loss nor was he incapacitated' as a result of the injury. Despite this evidence, the FLMIF agreed to pay the ex-player £100 plus costs in settlement. And in other cases, such as those concerning Blackburn's Roxburgh and Barnsley's Archibald, payments were made even though both players were in their late thirties and thus in the last stage of their careers regardless of injury.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ Minutes of West Ham United FC, 28 October, 1 December 1930; 3, 11 April, 8 August 1933.

¹⁴⁷ Quoted in Minutes of AFPTU, 22 August 1927 (AGM).

¹⁴⁸ Minutes of Football League, 8 September 1922.

¹⁴⁹ Minutes of AFPTU, 21 August 1933 (AGM); 24 August 1931 (AGM), 20 August 1934 (AGM).

The procedure for settling claims certainly set up an adversarial relationship between the FLMIF and the club on one side, and the Union and the injured player on the other. During one set of negotiations the Union was informed by the FLMIF that 'on no account will compensation be paid unless and until they are compelled to do so after a fight' and certain players were accused - occasionally with justification - of giving dishonest information or making fictitious claims.¹⁵⁰ The problems of re-registering players who had already received compensation exacerbated these conflicts. In 1926 the Management Committee notified clubs that it would neither register nor insure players who had received lump sum settlements unless they could prove complete recovery from their injuries and later ruled that those receiving over £100 compensation could not be registered for at least a year after the settlement date.¹⁵¹ Following the application of this rule to a player seeking to resume his career with a month's trial at Darlington, the Union strongly attacked the League's treatment of injured players. It complained that the player, Cook, had got compensation of just £125, which the FLMIF said should cover two years, but that his injury prevented him returning to his former occupation of mining. It was considered 'disgraceful that any man should be debarred from earning his livelihood' in both occupations. And Fay complained bitterly that with the Federation's final payment 'the door is locked, bolted and barred to the player should he recover and be fit to take his place in the game once more'.¹⁵² On the other hand the Union was forced in 1934 to condemn the action of another member who had represented himself as fit to play League football less than two months after being awarded £400 compensation by the FLMIF. Sutcliffe implicitly warned the Union that a repetition of such action might lead to a toughening of the FLMIF's policy and practice.¹⁵³ Tensions between the Union and the FLMIF over claims procedure had, however, probably peaked in 1927 over a case where a member settled his claim directly with the League after initiating proceedings

¹⁵⁰ Minutes of AFPTU, 22 August 1927 (AGM).

¹⁵¹ Minutes of Football League, 13 March, 13 December 1926.

¹⁵² Minutes of AFPTU, 22 August 1927 (AGM); PFA, File 35, James A. Fay, 'Star players career ended by injury: Offered £200 Compensation', Draft of Fourth Newspaper Article, 1938/39, otherwise undated, p. 2.

¹⁵³ Minutes of AFPTU, 8 October, 10 December 1934.

through the Union. Hinchcliffe considered this a calculated move to marginalise the influence of the Union:

It is quite evident that the Football League are going to go behind our backs wherever they can, and not only deprive the Union of proving to players (non-members) of the brilliant services rendered by the Union, but also depriving me of your valuable work and making it more costly for the Union from a legal point of view.¹⁵⁴

It would be wrong to assume, however, that incapacitated players were always paid the minimum possible compensation by clubs and discarded when they ceased to be of immediate use to the team. Even at a purely financial level, it may often have been less expensive to treat and compensate an injured player than to buy a replacement. This may explain Coventry City's 'good treatment' of Widdowson, who received his full weekly wage in addition to weekly compensation during his injury lay-off and, after an operation, was signed on full wages despite not yet being fully fit.¹⁵⁵ Such instances were certainly unusual but not unique and there is considerable evidence of clubs paying for operations or signing incapacitated players when neither the FLMIF nor the Workmen's Compensation legislation actually compelled them to do so. Moreover, from 1932 the League regulated the practice of re-signing injured players by allowing a special contract termination clause operable if the player had still not recovered within a month of the beginning of the new season.¹⁵⁶ Players forced to retire through injury similarly appeared to be treated generously by football employers. Benefit matches and/or payments were generally granted by the better off clubs. Blackwell received £500 from Sheffield United, even though the club was not legally liable, after abdominal trouble had 'rendered him incompetent to fulfil the terms of his contract'; Fulham similarly granted Dudley a benefit match which raised £280 in addition to the FLMIF's *ex gratia* payment of £150, while strenuously denying liability for the player's heart trouble.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁴ Minutes of AFPTU, 22 August 1927 (AGM).

¹⁵⁵ Minutes of AFPTU, 26 August 1929 (AGM).

¹⁵⁶ Sutcliffe *et al.*, *Football League*, p. 131.

¹⁵⁷ Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 24 September, 2, 7 October 1924; Minutes of AFPTU, 24 April 1933.

The death of an employee, however, provided the best opportunity for League and club to publicly assert their philanthropic tendencies. A good illustration of this was the collective response engendered by the death of the Chelsea player Tommy Meehan in August 1924. The League immediately donated £50 from its own benevolent fund, established a benefit fund for the player's dependents and organised a Football League team to play Chelsea in a benefit match in aid of the fund. By December the Meehan fund had raised over £1,800, including almost £600 subscribed separately by League clubs.¹⁵⁸ Meehan's relatives undoubtedly benefited from his having been a prominent representative player - appearing three times for the Football League XI between 1922 and 1924 - because in most cases such public fund-raising was restricted for deceased League or club officials or the victims of colliery disasters rather than players (see chapter 9). Indeed by contrast, Henry Cunningham's elderly parents received just £300 from the FLMIF in 1929 when their son died from a football-related injury sustained in training, while the widow of another Cunningham, Peter of Crewe, was afforded small grants of only £10 each from the FA and League to cover the wages owed to her late husband after his entry into a sanatorium.¹⁵⁹ In the majority of cases, then, even a seriously ill player could expect no more than a small *ad hoc* grant from his club, and perhaps from the benevolent fund of the FA, League or Union and though in the event of death the Union also provided a £100 burial grant for members' families, even this was rudimentary when compared with the financial protection offered by an organisation like the actor's Royal General Theatrical Fund.¹⁶⁰

Notwithstanding the FLMIF's determination to limit compensation payments whenever possible, the Union achieved a gradual increase in sums received by injured players during the inter-war period. As Table 6.2 indicates, seasonal figures were prone to fluctuation but the general trend was upwards, with over seven times more compensation being paid to players overall in the late 1930s than during the early 1920s. It appears that this was due to increases in the number rather than the size of settlement claims, though precise data on this question is unavailable. In 1926 lump-sum settlements ranged from £50 to £300 and stayed fairly consistent throughout the

¹⁵⁸ Minutes of Football League, 5 September, 15 December 1924.

¹⁵⁹ Minutes of AFPTU, 26 August 1929 (AGM); 11 March, 26 August 1935.

¹⁶⁰ On the RGTF see Sanderson, *From Irving to Olivier*, pp. 87-91.

late 1920s and early 1930s, even during a season like 1928/29 which witnessed a substantial leap in total compensation. By 1932 some players on higher earnings were able to secure up to £600 and, moreover, there were signs that by this point the FLMIF was actively searching for ways to reduce compensation payments.¹⁶¹ The first such attempt was Sutcliffe's controversial contract clause which was considered, but eventually rejected, by the League clubs in 1934. The proposed clause threatened the established practice of players receiving full wages until their contract expired: henceforth the full salary was to be paid only for the first fortnight or month after the injury or sickness; half salary for the same consecutive period; and then after two months maximum the club was to be permitted to stop the players' wage and put him on compensation. In Sutcliffe's view the change was in keeping with broader employer practice: 'In every phase of work... as soon as a workman is injured he is at once put on compensation, but in football, not so'.¹⁶² But the Union angrily condemned the proposal and demanded its immediate withdrawal, stating:

that the Football League Management Committee, for reasons best known to themselves, seem to be intent upon making the lives of players as difficult as possible; that the attempt to impose upon players such conditions of employment are tantamount to slavery; that, should players have the misfortune to be stricken with illness or crippled physically, they also wish to cripple them financially.¹⁶³

¹⁶¹ Minutes of AFPTU, 1 March 1926; 26 August 1929 (AGM); 18 January 1932.

¹⁶² PFA, File 35, C. E. Sutcliffe, 'The Snag of the Injured Player', Draft of Newspaper article, 1934, otherwise undated, p. 1.

¹⁶³ Minutes of AFPTU, 20 August 1934 (AGM).

Table 6.2 Payments made by the FLMIF to AFPTU members for compensation under the Workmen's Compensation Act, 1920/21-1938/39

Season	Total Compensation* (in pounds)	Season	Total Compensation* (in pounds)
1920/21	760	1930/31	5,101
1921/22	1,250	1931/32	5,134
1922/23	895	1932/33	4,087
1923/24	1,132	1933/34	6,035
1924/25	900	1930/31	7,583
1925/26	2,876	1931/32	6,508
1926/27	1,015	1936/37	5,637
1927/28	1,360	1937/38	9,476
1928/29	5,187	1938/39	7,154
1929/30	4,365		

* Lump sum payments and weekly compensation.
Source: Annual Solicitor's Reports of AFPTU.

At the same time the basic principles underlying both private and state insurance cover, which had been established back in 1912, were seriously disturbed by Justice Roach's verdict in April 1934 that professional footballers were no longer considered to be employed by way of manual labour. The whole question had been re-opened by the Ministry of Health and its direct relevance was to the health insurance of players by the state although it also had profound implications for the rights of players under the Workmen's Compensation Acts. Those League players who received over £250 per year in wages and bonuses - undoubtedly a considerable majority - were now denied compulsory insurance and health, pension and unemployment benefits although the Ministry did make concessions to allow them to continue contributing to the scheme voluntarily.¹⁶⁴ More importantly, perhaps, a parallel decision by Justice Roach in the Graham and Millwall FC case meant that any professional footballer whose annual remuneration exceeded £350 had no future claim against his club under the Workmen's Compensation Acts. Initially the FLMIF agreed to continue 'to treat all players alike' regardless of income but from 1935 it began to refuse compensation to a number of players forced to retire through injury. Sutcliffe informed the Union of the FLMIF's change of policy by stating that 'owing to the many calls during recent years it would not be possible in future to deal with any injured players who were

¹⁶⁴ Minutes of AFPTU, 24 April 1933, 20 August 1934 (AGM); Sutcliffe *et al.*, *Football League*, pp. 39, 131-32.

outside the Workmen's Compensation Acts'.¹⁶⁵ Considerable opposition from the Union and certain club directorates, however, led the FLMIF to refer the question directly to the clubs, who agreed by a large majority to treat players receiving £350-plus salaries as if they came under the provisions of the Acts and make *ex gratia* payments accordingly.¹⁶⁶ Though this represented a partial victory for the better paid players, the FLMIF continued to attempt to limit its liabilities by reducing weekly compensation payments when injuries had improved sufficiently to allow those players unable to play football to engage in some form of 'light work'. Again the Union responded angrily by pointing out that 'whilst the Federation are entitled to do this legally, at the same time it is unfair and unjust to take advantage of the Workmen's Compensation Act as though the player were an industrial worker'.¹⁶⁷ Indeed the Union's general dissatisfaction with the levels of compensation led to a unsuccessful proposal in March 1939 that weekly compensation be increased from 35s. to £3 per week and lump sum settlements be fixed, with a maximum pay-out of £1,000.¹⁶⁸

Yet despite the FLMIF's attempts to reduce costs and the accusation that players were inadequately compensated for their loss of employment, the League's insurance scheme continued to suffer financial problems in the years preceding the Second World War. In March 1937 the FA Finance and General Purposes Committee actually paid off the FLMIF's deficit of £5,446 which had built up over the previous ten years and agreed to contribute £660 annually over the following four years to cover its average deficit.¹⁶⁹ The compensation of injured players, therefore, was still the major financial burden for the League in 1939 that it had been when the FLMIF was established in 1912 and remained throughout a potential source of conflict between the axes of player-Union and club-League.

¹⁶⁵ Minutes of AFPTU, 26 August 1935 (AGM)

¹⁶⁶ Sutcliffe *et al.*, *Football League*, pp. 129-30; Minutes of AFPTU, 14 October 1935. It is interesting to contrast the attitude of the West Ham board, which was anxious to make new arrangements to cover the £350-plus men, with that of Sheffield United, which replied curtly that it did not favour including these players in the insurance scheme. Minutes of West Ham United FC, 16 September 1935; Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 18 September 1935.

¹⁶⁷ PFA, File 35, James A. Fay, 'A Job for Parliament', Draft of Third Newspaper Article, 1938/39, otherwise undated, pp. 2-3; Minutes of AFPTU, 22 August 1938;

¹⁶⁸ Minutes of AFPTU, 13 March 1939 (EGM).

¹⁶⁹ Minutes of FA Finance and General Purposes Committee, 8 March 1937.

Another important aspect of welfare provision involved the treatment of players after their footballing careers had ended. Typically League clubs, in common with most private companies, were discriminatory in arranging for the future well-being of retired employees. Ex-players who were destitute or down on their luck were sometimes able to secure *ad hoc* grants from the respective benevolent funds of the Union or governing bodies. A former Burnley player called Wallace, for instance, who 'found himself in distress' after being forced to stop playing through illness and failing to find other work, received grants totalling £25 from the Union in addition to £50 grants from both the League and FA. Aston Villa particularly prided itself on its record of assisting old players 'in poor circumstances' financially. And when Stephen Bloomer, the famous ex-Derby County and England forward, became seriously ill with asthma and bronchitis 23 years after his retirement, a public fund was established by the Derby manager and other local figures which raised over £500 to send him on a cruise to Australia.¹⁷⁰

Notwithstanding occasional instances of this kind, however, the League made no attempt to develop comprehensive schemes to provide financially for players on retirement or facilitate their movement towards other careers until the very end of the 1930s. Professional footballers as insured workers were, of course, included in the provisions of the 1925 Old Age and Widows and Orphans Contributory Pensions Act but as the pension was to start at the age of 65 it was clearly of little immediate benefit for the player who retired in his 20s or 30s. Occupational pensions for footballers, however, were not considered until 1934 when Watson Hartley, a Liverpool solicitor, approached the League executive with a series of proposals, including a pension fund, which would be financed by his scheme to copyright the Football League fixture list. According to Hartley, the fund would enable all players 'with five or more years of service to be entitled to a pension, graded according to the years of service, payable on retiring from the game, and terminable by the League in the event of the player re-entering the game'. Yet the executive 'refused point-blank to consider the scheme', partly because the funding involved connections with the pools industry but also, as

¹⁷⁰ Minutes of AFPTU, 23 November 1936, 10 May 1937; Minutes of Aston Villa FC, 15 August 1922; 25 August 1926; Mason, 'Our Stephen and Our Harold', p. 82.

both Hartley and Fay recognised, because of its obstinate opposition to any suggestions emanating from outside Preston.¹⁷¹ This attitude had evidently changed by 1939, when a London insurance firm contacted the League and the Players' Union with plans for an endowment insurance policy for players. Although details of the proposed scheme are sketchy, it appears that the League, the Union, clubs and players were all expected to contribute to an endowment policy which was to mature when the player reached 32. Both the League and Union executives agreed to proceed with the scheme before the onset of hostilities left it in abeyance.¹⁷²

There were opportunities to remain within League football at some level after finishing playing, mainly as a trainer, coach or scout but increasingly by the 1920s as a manager or what was contemporaneously called a 'players' manager'. Many trainers were former professionals and were often promoted directly from the playing to the training-staff. Yet it must be understood that in terms both of income and status, a training job was not markedly dissimilar from a playing engagement and was equally insecure. For example, the Irish international William Gillespie was engaged as a coach by Sheffield United in 1930 whilst still playing first team football. He then took up the coaching position full-time but within two seasons he was informed that the club 'had no further use for his services owing to the appointment of a new manager'.¹⁷³ There was also a tendency from the 1920s for clubs to appoint former players as professional managers in place of the directors or secretaries who had previously been responsible for team affairs. Though this transformation was gradual and uneven, by 1923 Sutcliffe was able to justify the introduction of players' managers at Preston, Stoke and Hull City 'not on the principle of set a thief to catch a thief, but because they have, or seem to have, the necessary qualities to make good'.¹⁷⁴ But such positions were obviously limited and probably open only to the most able and reliable of former players.

¹⁷¹ PFA, File 33, Watson Hartley to Fay, 21 August 1934; Fay to Hartley, 24 August 1934.

¹⁷² See Minutes of AFPTU, 8, 22 May, 21 August 1939 (AGM).

¹⁷³ Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 26 February, 30 July 1930; 8 June 1932.

¹⁷⁴ *Topical Times*, 7 April 1923. On the development of professional managers see Wagg, *Football World*, chapter 5; Fishwick, *English Football*, pp. 35-38.

Similarly, fully-fledged coaching jobs - as opposed to training jobs which really involved simply maintaining the physical fitness of players - were extremely scarce at Football League clubs even by the end of the period. As Wagg has shown, many League clubs, administrators and even players remained ideologically opposed to the concept of coaching football skills¹⁷⁵ and the continent therefore offered far more, and better, opportunities for former League players who wished to coach. It is impossible to calculate exactly how many took this route but it seems certain that by the Second World War ex-League players were to be found coaching throughout most of Europe and beyond. Jimmy Hogan, for one, left Bolton Wanderers to coach in Holland during 1911 and continued to make his living coaching throughout Europe, including spells with the Austrian Olympic and Dutch national sides, before finally returning to England to coach Fulham in 1934. Another former League goalkeeper who had been coaching in France since 1911 noted in 1920 that 'it would not be possible to obtain a living wage in England for my services'.¹⁷⁶ The first step towards professional training and regulation of coaches in England was eventually taken by the FA, which from 1934 began to organise annual coaching courses which were attended by League trainers, managers and players, though amateurs also took part. Those who passed received official FA coaching certificates which were intended to help them secure positions at schools, colleges or even within the professional game: in fact, the FA's list of regional coaches in 1935/36 included a number of former elite players such T. Sampey in the Sheffield and Hallamshire area and Jesse Pennington in Worcestershire, whose job it was to co-ordinate and supervise schoolboy coaching in their region.¹⁷⁷ Wagg has suggested that this initiative encountered considerable resistance at League and club level but there is little evidence to support this claim. In fact, Sheffield United and Oldham Athletic both sent their entire training-staff on the coaching course and Huddersfield Town, among others, also encouraged its players to attend. Even so, no comparable initiatives came from Preston, despite the fact that Hartley's 1934 scheme had included a proposal to establish several regional centres

¹⁷⁵ See Wagg, *Football World*, pp. 12, 32-33, 60-61.

¹⁷⁶ Catton Folders, B-C, Letter from Charles Bunyan to Catton, 2 December 1920, p. 201. On Hogan see Tony Mason, 'Some Englishmen and Scotsmen Abroad: The Spread of World Football' in Alan Tomlinson and Garry Whannel (eds.), *Off The Ball: The Football World Cup*, London, 1986, p. 74.

¹⁷⁷ See Report of the FA Instructional Classes for Boys in Association Football (ICBAF) Committee, 1935/36.

for the coaching of young players under the supervision of 'well-known players of other years'.¹⁷⁸

Training in areas outside football was also slow to develop with League and club officials tending to leave such matters to the individuals concerned. Occasionally clubs would assist players in acquiring business or other interests, such as when Sheffield United arranged for captain George Utley to become the tenant of a local sports shop with a five-year contract to supply equipment to the club, but generally players were given no help in providing for their lives after football.¹⁷⁹ In 1936 the FA contacted the Board of Education and London County Council in order to arrange educational classes for professional footballers in the capital. While the reaction of clubs was poor, with only Charlton Athletic and Clapton Orient agreeing to cooperate, it did represent a turning-point as regards management's awareness of its responsibility for something more than the football education and training of employees. Nine Clapton players were able to attend courses in commerce, general education and woodwork, while Charlton organised for courses in elementary accounts and business methods to be conducted at its ground and enrolled other players interested in learning technical subjects at the local Woolwich Polytechnic.¹⁸⁰ It was not until 1938, however, that the League accepted some responsibility for the educational and vocational training of players with the launch of its Jubilee Trust Fund. The object was to raise £100,000 for the purpose of financially assisting players, ex-players and club officials in times of need and also developing arrangements for the re-training of former professionals in new trades or professions. To this end each first division club was compelled to contribute £1,000, with those in the second and third divisions giving £500 and £250 respectively, while a series of pre-season derby matches in August 1938 raised a further £27,443, although even with extra donations and another series of Jubilee derbies the following year the fund was still some way short of the £100,000 mark.¹⁸¹ Moreover, the League's delay in

¹⁷⁸ Wagg, *Football World*, p. 33; Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 1 June 1937; Minutes of Oldham Athletic FC, 29 June 1938; Minutes of Huddersfield Town FC, 24 May 1939; PFA, File 33, Hartley to Fay, 21 August 1934.

¹⁷⁹ Fishwick, *English Football*, p. 77.

¹⁸⁰ Report of FA ICBAF Committee, 1936/37.

¹⁸¹ *Football League Jubilee Souvenir Booklet*, August 1938. On the fund's finances see Inglis, *League Football*, pp. 159, 164.

deciding precisely how the money was to be distributed, and its reluctance to include the Players' Union on the fund Committee, led to accusations by early 1939 that the fund had proved 'a flop'.¹⁸² Indeed, arrangements for the vocational element of the fund's activities were clearly only at the planning stage by September 1939. Club directorates had been asked in January to inquire into the suitability of local facilities for vocational training and the Management Committee had embarked on talks with the Players' Union as well as with teaching and educational authorities, including the Chief Inspector of the Board of Education, but there had been no practical achievements and no player was able to benefit from the fund until League football proper resumed after the war.¹⁸³

4. Conclusion

The change in the status of the professional player in the Football League between the turn of the century and the outbreak of the Second World War was more apparent than real. It is indeed possible to argue that the elite players were beginning to acquire 'professional status' as defined by Harold Perkin as 'a career with security of tenure, rising scales of pay, and the customary white-collar fringe benefits'.¹⁸⁴ Certainly, clubs were increasingly less likely to dismiss players at short notice as often occurred in manual work: almost all had annual contracts and, if incapacitated through injury or sickness, were paid until at least the end of their contract and sometimes longer. Moreover, the majority of players in the top two divisions and many below enjoyed what effectively amounted to fifteen weeks paid holiday during the close season and, though a scheme for occupational pensions was still being planned, they were given other customary rewards related to loyalty such as benefit payments. There were, additionally, indications that the League professional of the 1920s and 1930s had acquired a respectability that his predecessors lacked: he seems to have stayed more sober, to have been more disciplined and even occasionally to have taken on some of the habits of the middle class, like the playing of golf and the driving of motor cars.

¹⁸² PFA, File 33, Hartley to Fay, 6 February 1939; *Manchester Evening News*, 1 March 1939.

¹⁸³ Minutes of Oldham Athletic FC, 18, 25 January 1939; Minutes of AFPTU, 8 May 1939.

¹⁸⁴ Harold Perkin, *The Rise of Professional Society: England Since 1880*, London, 1989, p. 314.

Yet in general there is little doubt that League players were still perceived as subordinate employees, rather than self-confident professionals, and had little control over their own career structures. With the possible exception of the few star players whose outstanding talent gave them a degree of freedom in the labour market, Pickford's description of the professional footballer from 1906 was equally pertinent to 1939: once registered, he remained 'tied up, "cribbed, cabined, and confined"' and was ultimately forced 'to obey club instructions and do what he is told'.¹⁸⁵ For Sutcliffe and other members of the League executive or club directorates, it was still crucial that clubs should 'rule' players and remain 'masters' over their 'men' in every possible area of their employment. Indeed, we have seen that most of the benevolent and welfare arrangements which benefited players by the late 1930s had not been gained by players through their Union but were the product of 'the enlightened self-interest' of their employers. In the Football League as in other industries, the extension of welfare schemes to cover accidents, pensions, sickness or death was not the work of idealistic paternalists but of hard-headed employers intent on maximising the efficiency and ensuring the dependence of their workforces at the lowest possible cost.¹⁸⁶

In spite of the institutionalisation of welfare arrangements and the faltering growth of unionism, Football League players in the 1930s were still subject to essentially the same forms of discipline and techniques of control established in the late nineteenth century. While their compliance to the wishes of club directors may be overstated in the existing literature, footballers remained nonetheless in a relatively weak position in negotiations and disputes with management. Even the arguments used by Union officials to force concessions from the League were often wrapped up in a vocabulary of paternalism. As late as 1939 Jimmy Fay could declare that club directors 'have a moral responsibility similar to the industrial employer to see that their employees are paid a fair and just wage, to enable them to live comfortably, and enable them to support the home, and if married, the wife and family'.¹⁸⁷ In this respect, the attitude of footballers was quite unlike that of actors, or even the less respectable music-hall

¹⁸⁵ Pickford and Gibson (eds), *Association Football*, vol. 2, p. 200.

¹⁸⁶ Perkin, *Professional Society*, p. 307; Hay, 'Employers and Social Policy', pp. 439-40.

¹⁸⁷ PFA, File 35, James A. Fay, 'Too Old at Thirty', Draft of Eighth Newspaper Article, 1938/39, otherwise undated, p. 3.

artistes, who considered themselves as joint partners in agreements with their employers. Even the leading football stars would not have regarded their relationship with management as the ventriloquist William Herbert Clemart did: 'The artiste is of equal importance to a manager as he is to us... I object to the word 'employer'. I am a party to a contract'.¹⁸⁸ This was a more complete form of professionalisation - related to social and contractual status more than earning power - which was out of place in the more regulated and hierarchical employment structure of the Football League.

¹⁸⁸ Rutherford, 'Managers in a small way', p. 109.

CHAPTER SEVEN

'THE STRONG MUST HELP THE WEAK':

LEAGUE POLICY AND THE EQUALITY QUESTION

Competition is an inevitable and essential prerequisite for the survival of any modern sports club: without opponents there would be no product, no attendances and consequently no revenue. Even in their rudimentary stages, prior to the creation of cup competitions or leagues, clubs were necessarily dependent upon one other and had established economic as well as sporting ties which were crucial to their continued existence. At the most basic level, the creation of a league merely formalised these relations. But economists of sport both in North America and Europe have gone a step further by arguing that professional sports leagues operate in the same fundamental way as do industrial cartels. They can be seen as 'a coalition of teams with restrictive practices in both product and labour markets designed to protect the interests of member clubs' with 'a central structure... for developing rules and enforcing controls'.¹ Where sports cartels arguably differ from industrial ones, however, are in their basic functions and objectives. P. J. Sloane has observed that while conventional firms usually combine in order to prevent potentially damaging price wars, the objective of combination among sports firms is to ensure both the production of the common product and the equality of playing competition between clubs.²

Both modern economists and conventional observers have stressed the economic value of preserving a relative equality between clubs on a match-by-match and longer term basis. In short, it is assumed (though it has never been convincingly proven) that attendances are higher where the result of a match is uncertain and thus that a league's viability depends on keeping clubs as equal in terms of playing strength as possible.³

¹ J. A. Schofield, 'The Development of First-Class Cricket in England: An Economic Analysis', *Journal of Industrial Economics*, 30, 4, 1982, p. 338.

² Sloane, 'Restriction of Competition', p. 6.

³ See P. J. Sloane, *Sport in the Market?*, Hobart Paper No. 85, London, 1980, pp. 25-6; James Quirk and Rodney D. Fort, *Pay Dirt: The Business of Professional Team Sports*, Princeton, 1992, p. 243; Arnold, 'Rich man, Poor man', pp. 50-51; Keith Sandiford and Wray Vamplew, 'The Peculiar Economics of English Cricket Before 1914', *BJSH*, 3, 3, 1986, p. 314.

Certainly many League officials, club directors and football writers appeared to subscribe to this 'uncertainty of outcome' hypothesis and positively encouraged the adoption of measures designed to minimise inequality. And, as we shall see, compared with the elite county cricket and rugby league tournaments, the Football League remained a highly competitive and relatively open championship throughout this period.⁴ Yet it will be argued in this chapter that equalisation policies, though generally accepted and promoted at Committee level, encountered considerable resistance from those clubs who were inclined to put self-interest before group-interest. Individual clubs were perhaps quite naturally concerned with improving their own ground facilities, attendances, playing squad and bank balance: the finances of other clubs remained a secondary consideration so long as sufficient opponents existed to maintain the viability of the league. Only gradually, and largely through the necessary implementation of cross-subsidisation policies during the First World War, were the major clubs persuaded to accept the concept of equality as a central plank of League policy. It will also be stressed that the support for equalisation policies was not simply motivated by economic concerns. Historians have for too long ignored the possibility that crudely-defined notions of 'fair competition' and 'playing the game' could continue to influence the conduct and values of *professional* sport years after the presumed heyday of the gentleman amateur in the late nineteenth century. Indeed, for Sutcliffe, Bentley, Lewis and other important League administrators, whose association with football had begun as players in small amateur clubs (see chapter 1), an equal league competition was both economically and morally justifiable. In their view, every club should have a fair chance to reach the top of the table regardless of resources and if a club struggled it should be helped along by its fellow members.

1. Equality and Economic Theory

The theoretical ideal of a completely equal and competitively balanced sporting league has never been achieved in reality. Economic analyses show that even North American sporting leagues, which have adopted equalisation policies throughout their histories, have been unable in practice to prevent competitive imbalance and the

⁴ See Vamplew, *Pay Up*, chapter 9 for the pre-First World War period.

concentration of championships. This has been most apparent in baseball, where the New York Yankees dominated the American League from the 1920s to the 1970s by winning 29 of the 50 available pennants, but is evident in all the major American professional team sports. Weak or 'problem' clubs also cause perennial difficulties for league administrators, though these have been eased in the long-term by changes in ownership or franchise moves to more viable cities.⁵ Restrictions in the distribution of player talent - mainly through the reserve clause and the player draft - have been combined in these leagues with various income-sharing arrangements between clubs with the intention of achieving some degree of playing equality. However, it is argued that these arrangements have been largely ineffective in balancing playing strengths essentially because franchises are necessarily situated in cities with vast differences in population and thus in drawing potential.⁶ Playing equality has therefore proved to be an illusive and unobtainable ideal.

Certainly, in the Football League no club reached the level of dominance achieved by the New York Yankees. In the 34 official seasons during this period only one club - Arsenal - won the first division championship five times while the Merseyside neighbours Liverpool and Everton were the only clubs to do so on four occasions; it is also noteworthy that thirteen clubs held the title at least once. As Table 7.3 shows, the most consistently successful club over the whole period, Sunderland, achieved just 15 top-five finishes in 34 seasons; a poor record when compared with the leading Scottish League clubs Celtic and Rangers who were never out of the top-five. Moreover, Sunderland was the only leading English side (in Table 7.3) to avoid spending at least one season in the second division, suggesting that even the most successful clubs suffered periodic setbacks. That is not to deny, of course, that certain teams enjoyed short periods of dominance. One can point to Huddersfield Town's triple-championship victories from 1923/24 to 1925/26 and Arsenal's repeat of this in the early 1930s. Nevertheless, Tables 7.1 and 7.2 indicate that long-term domination of the highest positions by either a single club or a group of clubs was rare. Only Sunderland, Aston Villa and Sheffield Wednesday appear on both the pre- and post-

⁵ Quirk and Fort, *Pay Dirt*, chapter 7; Sloane, 'Restriction of Competition', p. 15.

⁶ See James Quirk and Mohamed El Hodiri, 'The Economic Theory of a Professional Sports League' in Roger G. Noll (ed.), *Government and the Sports Business*, Washington, 1974, pp. 33-58.

1914 tables and, though this suggests that they enjoyed a disproportionate share of playing success, it hardly equates with a sustained period of superiority. Indeed, it might be argued from this evidence that no core group of elite clubs existed in the Football League before 1939.

Table 7.1 Championship record of most successful Football League clubs, 1900/01-1914/15

	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	Top Five
Newcastle United	3	0	2	3	0	8
Aston Villa	1	5	0	1	1	8
Sunderland	2	1	3	0	1	7
Blackburn Rovers	2	0	2	2	1	7
Everton	1	4	1	1	0	7
Sheffield Wednesday	1	0	2	0	3	6
Total	10	10	10	7	6	43
Possible Maximum	15	15	15	15	15	75

Source: Jim Mallory (ed.), *Football League Tables*, London, 1977.

Table 7.2 Championship record of most successful Football League clubs, 1919/20-1938/39

	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	Top Five
Huddersfield Town	3	3	2	1	1	10
Arsenal	5	2	1	0	1	9
Sunderland	1	2	3	1	1	8
Sheffield Wednesday	2	0	4	0	0	6
Liverpool	2	0	0	3	1	6
Aston Villa	0	2	1	1	2	6
Total	13	9	11	6	6	45
Possible Maximum	19	19	19	19	19	95

Source: Mallory, *League Tables*.

Table 7.3 Competition Dominance of Football League and Scottish Football League Clubs, 1900/01-1938/39

	<u>Football League</u>		<u>Scottish League</u>
	Top Five Finishes		Top Five Finishes*
Sunderland	15	Celtic	38
Aston Villa	13	Rangers	38
Newcastle United	12	Hearts	19
Sheffield Wednesday	12	Motherwell	16
Everton	11	Airdrie	11
Liverpool	10	Falkirk	10
Huddersfield Town	10	Aberdeen	8
Total	83		140
Possible Maximum	170		190*

* Scottish League continued for four seasons during the First World War
Source: Mallory, *League Tables*.

Variations in championship distribution and top-five places are of course not the only method of assessing league equality. Vamplew has attempted to calculate the degree of equality between clubs within each season from 1888/89 to 1914/15 by measuring the extent to which winning percentages deviated from the 50% ideal.⁷ The greater the deviations recorded, the higher the static equality of competition (S.E.C.) and consequently the less equal the clubs in that particular competition are. Comparisons were made between the major football leagues in England and Scotland and with cricket's county championship and the Northern Rugby Football League, the main results of which are summarised in Table 7.4. On the basis of these calculations, the first and second divisions of the Football League both emerge as considerably more competitive than other sporting leagues before the First World War, with mean S.E.C.'s of 10.5 and 14.1 respectively compared with the next lowest S.E.C. of 17.2 for county cricket. Through measuring dynamic equality of competition (D.E.C.), Vamplew has also shown that the first division of the League exhibited greater equality over time than did the other leagues; this, in turn, supports the view that long-term ascendancy was rare and that the constituency of the League elite was variable. Another method of measuring equality has been employed by Michael E. Canes in an analysis of American professional and college leagues.⁸ His focus on the winning percentages⁹ of each championship club and the percentage of successive championship victories has been applied (where possible) in Table 7.5 to each division of the Football League along with the Scottish first division and the rival Southern League. Again the Football League first division championship emerges as the closest competition, although champions of the lower divisions were able to win slightly more often. The clearest contrast is with the Scottish League champions, who between 1900/01 and 1938/39 recorded a mean winning percentage of 81.0 compared with just 68.1 for their English counterparts: in fact the mean figure for Scotland was greater than (or equal to) the highest winning percentages in all but the Football League second division. This relative inequality is also reflected by the fact that the Scottish champions were able to repeat their success the subsequent season over 50%

⁷ Vamplew, *Pay Up*, chapter 9, especially Tables 9.2, 9.5, 9.12, 9.13, 9.14, 9.15, 9.20 and 9.21.

⁸ Michael E. Canes, 'The Social Benefits of Restrictions on Team Quality' in Noll, *Government and Sports*, pp. 85-92.

⁹ Canes actually looked at won-lost percentages as few American sports permit drawn games; this is less applicable to British football which has a high percentage of draws.

of the time, while the percentages were just 20 and 13.3 respectively for the top divisions of the Football and Southern Leagues.

Table 7.4 Static and Dynamic equality of competition in British football, cricket and rugby league, 1888-1915

Competition	Period	Mean S.E.C.*	D.E.C.** Range	
			One-year lag	Ten-year lag
Football League First Division	1888/89-1914/15	10.5	0.23-0.64	0.19-0.26
Football League Second Division	1892/93-1914/15	14.1	n/a	n/a
Scottish League First Division	1890/91-1914/15	18.3	0.54-0.61	0.28-0.33
Scottish League Second Division	1896/97-1898/99	20.0	n/a	n/a
	1902/03-1913/14			
Cricket County Championship	1892-1914	17.2	0.53-0.64	0.31-0.47
Northern Rugby Football League	1905/06-1914/15	19.7	0.63	n/a

* As measured by the standard deviation of winning percentages each season. Draws were classed as a 50% win to both sides.

** As measured by the mean rank order correlation of championship positions.

Source: Vamplew, *Pay Up*, chapter 9.

Table 7.5 Winning Percentages* of Championship clubs and Successive Championship Victories in British Football, 1900-39

League/Division		Period	Mean winning percentage	Highest winning percentage	Lowest winning percentage	Percentage of successive championship seasons
Football League First Division	First	1900/01-1914/15	67.6	79.4	60.5	6.7
		1919/20-1938/39	68.5	78.6	61.9	30.0
		1900/01-1938/39	68.1	79.4	60.5	20.0
Football League Second Division	Second	1900/01-1914/15	75.6	86.8	68.4	n/a
		1919/20-1938/39	69.1	83.3	63.1	n/a
		1900/01-1938/39	71.9	86.8	63.1	n/a
Football League Third Division (S)	Third	1920/21-1938/39	70.6	81.0	64.3	n/a
Football League Third Division (N)	Third	1921/22-1938/39	71.4	79.8	66.7	n/a
Scottish League First Division	First	1900/01-1938/39	81.0	90.5	72.4	51.3
Southern League First Division	First	1900/01-1914/15	71.0	80.0	65.8	13.3

* Draws classed as a 50% win.

Sources: Calculated from data in Mallory, *League Tables*; Harrison, *Southern League Football*.

The relative equality of competition in the Football League when compared with its competitors in football and other team sports has generally been explained by the success of four initiatives: the retain-and-transfer system; the maximum wage; central control over league quality; and pooling or income-sharing arrangements. Certainly

the lack of some form of stipulated maximum payment for players and the absence of a system for controlling the size and quality of the competing group - such as the promotion/relegation and election systems in the League - have both frequently been posited as reasons for the inequalities of the Scottish football, county cricket and rugby league championships.¹⁰ Yet theoretical and empirical studies concerned with whether such arrangements actually bring about greater competition within leagues have often proved inconclusive. Economists have cast considerable doubt, for instance, on the utility of the reserve clause and other restrictions on player mobility in American team sports as a means of increasing closeness of sporting competition, an argument which has also been applied to the League's retain-and-transfer system.¹¹ There is similarly little conclusive evidence that these Football League initiatives had a significant equalising effect before 1939. Measurements of the effectiveness of the retain-and-transfer system in this respect are especially troublesome as it operated from the early 1890s. Some attempt can be made, however, to assess the impact of the maximum wage, introduced for the 1901/02 season. Table 7.6 shows that for the first division the mean S.E.C. and championship winning percentage was lower in the five seasons following the wage rule than before, suggesting a more equal competition. The contrast was less marked in the second division, where the winning percentage of the first-placed club actually increased after 1901/02¹²; and even in the first division there were seasons, such as 1904/05, in which equality of competition was worse than pre-maximum wage levels.

¹⁰ Sandiford and Vamplew, 'Economics of English Cricket', pp. 314-17; Schofield, 'Development of First-Class Cricket', pp. 341, 357; Vamplew, *Pay Up*, pp. 139-44, 148-51.

¹¹ See especially various essays in Noll, *Government and Sports*; Quirk and Fort, *Pay Dirt*, pp. 268-93; Sloane, 'Restriction of Competition', pp. 14-17.

¹² The maximum wage probably had less impact in the second division as fewer clubs were able to pay £4 to many players either before or after 1901.

Table 7.6 Relative Equality of Football League first and second divisions before and after the introduction of the Maximum Wage Rule in 1901/02

Season	First Division		Second Division	
	S.E.C*	Winning percentage of championship clubs**	S.E.C*	Winning percentage of championship clubs**
1896/97	10.9	78.3	13.7	70.0
1897/98	9.3	70.0	17.3	80.0
1898/99	8.2	66.2	17.0	75.0
1899/1900	10.9	73.5	17.6	79.4
1900/01	9.0	66.2	11.6	72.1
Mean Total	9.7	70.8	15.4	75.3
1901/02	5.6	64.7	13.7	80.9
1902/03	8.5	61.8	14.3	79.4
1903/04	10.6	69.1	12.3	73.5
1904/05	12.9	70.6	18.1	85.3
1905/06	8.3	67.1	16.2	86.8
Mean Total	9.2	66.5	14.9	81.2

* As measured in Table 7.4

** As measured in Table 7.5

Source: Based on data in Vamplew, *Pay Up*, p. 134 (Table 9.12); Table 7.5 (above).

Table 7.7 Performances of promoted and elected clubs in the Football League, 1900/01-1938/39

Period	First Division			Last Division*		
	Clubs promoted	Clubs in division	Average position of clubs in first season	Clubs elected	Clubs in division	Average position of elected clubs in first season
1900/01-1904/05	10	18	10	6	18	12
1905/06-1914/15	20	20	12	13	20	9
1919/20-1928/29	21	22	14	15	22**	13
1929/30-1938/39	20	22	11	7	22	13

Period	First Division		Last Division*		
	Clubs promoted	Remained in division at least two seasons	Clubs elected	Remained in League at least two seasons	Promoted within two seasons
1900/01-1909/10	22	19	15	13	2
1910/11-1919/20	13	12	9	9	0
1920/21-1929/30	18	16	10	10	1
1930/31-1937/38	18	17	5	5	0

* Second Division from 1900/01-1919/20. Third Division for 1920/21 and Third Divisions North and South thereafter.

** In its first two seasons (1921/22 and 1922/23) the Third Division (North) had only 20 clubs.

Based on Table 9.7 in Vamplew, *Pay Up*, p. 127.

Source: Calculated from data in Mallory, *League Tables*.

Sloane has suggested that an 'equal distribution of income is no less important than an equal distribution of playing talent in ensuring equality in terms of sporting competition'.¹³ But, while approaching nothing like the ideal of pooling *all* gate receipts and club income, the introduction of income-sharing arrangements in the Football League from the First World War seems to have been relatively ineffective in this respect. As Table 7.5 indicates, there was no marked change in the winning percentages of first and second division champions in the inter-war period compared with those before the war: in fact, the mean first division figure actually suggests a less equal competition after the 20 per cent payment to visiting clubs was established. There is more convincing evidence to suggest that the promotion and election systems encouraged competition and equality. Table 7.7 shows that the majority of promoted or elected clubs performed well in their new positions and managed to survive for at least two seasons, and often much longer. The fact that both Liverpool and Everton were able to win the first division championship at the first attempt after promotion (in 1905/06 and 1931/32 respectively) supports the belief that the lower divisions acted as a reservoir of quality clubs capable of increasing competition at the higher level to replace weaker sides which dropped down. The election system in the lower divisions also worked in this way, although Cardiff City's achievement in the early 1920s of gaining promotion to the first division in its first season and subsequently finishing fourth at the top level was comparatively rare. It may also be that the 'closed shop' which developed in the third division northern and southern sections for much of the inter-war period impeded equalisation of competition as consistently weak playing sides were generally not replaced by stronger clubs outside the League (see chapter 2).¹⁴

Notwithstanding the limited and unsophisticated nature of this statistical approach, the success of the equalisation measures employed between 1900 and 1939 has proved to be mixed. With the possible exception of the promotion system, there is little evidence that these policies substantially assisted the attainment of equality within the Football League. However, the important point for our purposes is that key figures

¹³ Sloane, 'Restriction of Competition', p. 10.

¹⁴ Barrow, for instance, finished bottom of the third division (north) on four occasions during the 1920s but still survived.

within the League hierarchy were convinced that they did.¹⁵ The remainder of this chapter will thus concentrate on the attitudes and debates surrounding the introduction and development of policies designed to promote equality. It will also trace the evolution of what might be regarded as an ideology of equality within League circles, formed around notions of fair competition, mutual support and the ambivalent concept of 'friendship'.

2. Equality of Playing Talent: The Maximum Wage and the Transfer System

In most sports, the principal step taken to attain equality of competition has involved the distribution of the major resource - playing talent. The American sports of basketball and football have traditionally used direct measures like the college or rookie draft, which attempts to equalise performance by giving teams with weaker playing records first choice of new players.¹⁶ However, indirect measures to control the mobility and payment of players have been more common on both sides of the Atlantic. First-class cricket developed a system of county qualifications from 1873 which allowed a player to compete either for his county of birth or his county of residence, although he was required to complete a two-year qualifying period before playing for his residential county. But it has been recognised that this did little to reverse the fundamental disparity between counties with vastly contrasting population sizes and financial resources and even led to an increased concentration of playing talent.¹⁷ Residential qualifications were occasionally advocated in the Football League as an alternative to the maximum wage in order to protect poorer clubs¹⁸, but the fact that clubs were based around towns and cities rather than counties and that football players were more mobile from the very beginning, probably precluded serious discussion on this point. Rugby League authorities chose to impose a maximum player roster, similar to the team player limits in American baseball and ice hockey, but there is again little evidence that the high 75-man limit prevented the

¹⁵ As Vamplew has noted, 'it is not calculated truths which determine a club's [or a League's] policy; what they believe to be true is far more significant'. Vamplew, *Pay Up*, p. 174.

¹⁶ Tony Arnold and Ivor Benveniste, 'Cross Subsidisation and Competition Policy in English Professional Football', *Journal of Industrial Affairs*, vol. 15, 1988, p. 2.

¹⁷ Sandiford and Vamplew, 'Economics of English Cricket', p. 314; Sissons, *The Players*, pp. 85-89.

¹⁸ See Major Frank Buckley's comments in Catton Folders, B-C, Newspaper cutting, 13 January 1919, p. 196.

monopolisation of talent by the wealthier clubs.¹⁹ In the Football League, however, the retain-and-transfer system and the maximum wage became the cornerstones of equalisation policy before the First World War.

For contemporaries, these measures served a dual purpose: they enabled clubs to control their employees and prevented the wealthier clubs buying up the best players. Many supporters of the transfer system believed its primary aim from the beginning was to maintain some degree of competitive balance within the League. *Athletic News* argued in 1895 that 'it will be a bad day for the League, the clubs, and the players when freedom all round is given. Teams must be comparatively level to sustain the interest - if they are not, receipts fall off, and without receipts players cannot be paid wages.'²⁰ When a club signed a player he remained its property 'for League purposes forever, unless an arrangement is made for his transfer'.²¹ Interested parties could be deterred by placing a prohibitive fee on the players' head but, if this proved unsuccessful, clubs still received compensation in the form of the transfer fee which could then be used to replace the lost player and improve the playing squad. By the 1900s League officials regarded the system as a fundamental and highly successful contribution to equalisation. Writing in 1901, president John Bentley suggested that

The chief object of the League is... to provide for an equality of strength as far as is practicable, and it is just here that the transfer law is of value, for anyone interested in the game knows perfectly well that if half a dozen wealthy organisations snapped up all the best players, the interest in the League Championship would be reduced to a minimum.²²

William Bassett, an international forward, future club director and League Committeeman, was convinced that without the considerable sums received from selling players, clubs like West Bromwich Albion, Barnsley and Bury would have been forced out of business.²³ Indeed, few commentators in the period doubted the orthodox view that the transfer system encouraged a levelling of playing performance.

¹⁹ Vamplew, *Pay Up*, p. 148.

²⁰ Quoted in Tischler, *Footballers and Businessmen*, p. 62.

²¹ William I. Bassett, 'Big Transfers and the Transfer System' in *Book of Football*, London, 1906, p. 160.

²² *Athletic News*, 29 April 1901.

²³ Bassett, 'Big Transfers', p. 160.

In response to the Southern League's decision to grant freedom of contract to its players in 1920, Charles Sutcliffe reaffirmed the overarching League ideology of equality. 'Freedom of contract' he argued, was 'contrary to the true League spirit. The strong must help the weak. Each for all and all for each. The gospel of the survival of the fittest is rotten in sport'.²⁴

Limits on transfer fees were also recommended at various times by officials and club directors but the idea never received sufficient club or Committee support and, in fact, opinion was mixed as to whether such a limit would be an obstacle or an aid to equality. In 1905 dissatisfaction with escalating transfer prices had provoked the FA to enforce a £350 maximum fee but this was easily evaded when it came into operation in 1908 and lasted just three months.²⁵ *Athletic News* advocated a fixed limit in 1911 on the grounds that high transfer prices negated the League's existing measures to equalise playing ability. 'The present system of allowing the highest bidder to capture the best player is a menace to the protection of the weaker club that has been the policy of The League for years.'²⁶ Yet it was richer clubs like Arsenal and Everton who supported a limit in the 1920s, primarily in order to reduce transfer expenditure.²⁷ Arsenal's chairman, Sir Henry Norris, admitted that 'some of the poorer clubs could not exist without large transfer fees' but, in direct opposition to the rhetoric of Sutcliffe and others, suggested that 'football was not organised with that object, and those that could not carry on should cease'. In contrast, Derby County's W. Bendle Moore enunciated the orthodox viewpoint that 'Players were assets to small clubs and they should be paid for'.²⁸ Most clubs evidently agreed with him: Arsenal's proposals to set a transfer limit of £1,650 received only five votes out of 40 in 1922 and ten the following year.

From its introduction for the 1901/02 season the maximum wage (initially £4 per week) was a far more contentious measure within League circles. More than any other rule it polarised the rich and poor clubs, who fought an annual battle over the

²⁴ Quoted in Sheffield United FC Programme, 17 April 1920, p. 11.

²⁵ Green, *History of the FA*, pp. 409-10.

²⁶ *Athletic News*, 13 November 1911.

²⁷ See Catton Folders, A-B, Arsenal FC Directors' Report, 1924, p. 21.

²⁸ Reports of Football League AGMs in *Athletic News*, 5 June 1922, 4 June 1923.

issue at the FA AGM for most of the subsequent decade. As we have seen, the wage limit was technically an FA rule but there is no doubt that Football League clubs were instrumental in its establishment and subsequent defence. Chief among these were representatives of Preston North End and Wolverhampton Wanderers, who could also rely on the support of League officials like Bentley and Sutcliffe. Fred Rinder, the leading opponent of the maximum, argued that initially neither the rich nor the poor clubs really wanted the rule; it had, in his view, been created in the interests of ten or so middle-sized clubs 'who could pay about £3 per week to a man'.²⁹ There is little evidence to support this claim. Early attempts to rescind the rule were easily defeated and though no systematic data exists to indicate the voting patterns of clubs on the issue, it seems that most League members were prepared to experiment with the maximum wage during the early 1900s. By the middle of the decade, however, criticisms of the operation of the wage rule were mounting. Many believed the rule had failed in its two basic objectives of reducing wage bills and encouraging equality of competition. According to Rinder, big city clubs were still able to dominate the championship by accumulating large squads and paying each player the £4 maximum. In addition, a number of clubs were clearly breaching wage and bonus regulations with many more undoubtedly going undetected (see chapter 5).³⁰ This was enough to convince Charles Clegg, FA chairman and a director of both Sheffield clubs, that even under the maximum wage wealthy clubs were still able to 'get the players they wanted' and hence that 'the inequality between the two classes of clubs [rich and poor] would not be greatly increased by the removal of the financial restrictions'.³¹

A very different interpretation of the maximum wage was offered by certain Committee members and club directors. John Lewis, for instance, League vice-president and a prominent authority on the game, had become convinced by 1907 of the direct link between the wage limit and increased public interest in League football. Though he had always objected to the rule in principle, there was little doubt in his mind that the clubs had collectively benefited from

²⁹ Report of FA AGM in *Athletic News*, 27 May 1901.

³⁰ Report of FA AGM in *Athletic News*, 6 June 1904; Mason, *Association Football*, pp. 99-100. See chapter 5.

³¹ Report of FA AGM in *Athletic News*, 1 June 1908.

the practical equality of the sides engaged in League combat. I don't say that the play is better than it was, or as good, but the teams are more equal, and therefore the games are more exciting than they would be if they were runaway affairs in favour of a few clubs... those who agitate for a return to the pre-limit days should consider whether concentration of playing talent would lead to unattractive games.³²

Sutcliffe agreed that the maximum wage 'has done something to equalise opportunity and level up and strengthen interest in competition' while Tom Sidney of Wolverhampton Wanderers noted in 1908 that 'clubs were of a much more equal playing strength than ever they were before'. The wage rule by this stage was considered fundamental to the survival of the so-called weaker clubs in the short-term and the League itself in the long run. Equality here had both ideological *and* economic value: it gave clubs like Wolves 'a chance to carry off the highest honours in the football world' and ultimately saved them from financial ruin.³³ Although the advocates of the maximum wage eventually won through, they did not do so without mounting opposition from within the League. Indeed, when the issue was debated at the FA annual meeting of 1909 only 14 of the 40 League clubs (six from the first division and eight from the second) voted to keep the wage limit. Six months later the FA Council balloted the 75 clubs in membership of the Football and Southern Leagues and found from the replies that 12 clubs favoured the abolition of wage restrictions and 19 opposed it.³⁴ For the first decade of the twentieth century, then, the League remained divided on the maximum wage issue, giving it neither unanimous support nor condemnation. But by 1910 the richer clubs appear to have been prepared to tolerate its continuance and redirected their energies towards the introduction of bonus payments.

Sporting leagues have generally chosen to avoid more direct forms of control over the playing strengths of their members which 'would require the league to act as a multi-plant firm which allocated staff to various parts of the country as circumstances dictated'.³⁵ In the Football League, as we noted above, belief in the ideology of

³² *Athletic News*, 4 March 1907.

³³ *Athletic News*, 8 February 1909; Report of FA AGM in *Athletic News*, 1 June 1908. The idea of equality having 'economic value' is taken from Vamplew, *Pay Up*, p. 174. The case of Wolves was particularly apt as they had won the FA Cup in 1908 as a second division side by beating reigning League champions Newcastle United in the final.

³⁴ Minutes of FA Council, 17 January 1910; *Athletic News*, 13 September 1909.

³⁵ Sloane, 'Restriction of Competition', p. 17.

equality meant the exclusion of clubs with consistently substandard playing records through the relegation and re-election systems. But on the rare occasions when clubs were weakened through long-term player suspensions, the League executive encouraged a more direct method of equalisation. The case of Manchester City in 1906 is instructive here. In the summer of that year an FA Commission found the club guilty of illegal payments to its players over a number of years and suspended 17 of its squad from playing football until the following January while banning them permanently from appearing for the club. Given this situation, Bentley wrote to all first division clubs explaining that City had 'been permanently deprived of the services of the majority of its players' and that he thought it was 'unfair for the board to start the season without... funds and with but few players.' He then issued an unprecedented appeal on behalf of the 'unfortunate' club:

League clubs ought, according to the original first rule of the League, to support each other. This is their opportunity, and I would seriously and with the greatest confidence, ask them to assist Manchester City to the extent of offering the transfer of players nominally free, with the proviso that when the City is in a position to negotiate, the... Management Committee should be allowed to fix an equitable fee.

I sincerely hope your directors will favourably consider the matter, and thus show that the Football League is not merely a name, but a body of clubs loyally banded together to assist and support each other, especially in times of need.

Manchester City just now is greatly in need of assistance and encouragement. Let them have it.³⁶

Although a majority of clubs apparently offered players or other assistance, some were highly critical of Bentley's intervention. An anonymous 'Director of a League Club' from Sheffield regarded Bentley's appeal as 'one of the most remarkable letters which has ever been written by one who holds a high position in football legislation'. The president was accused of acting as a 'special pleader' for a dishonest, rule-breaking club while

to clubs who have loyally carried out the rules as they stand, and who owing to misfortune are on the bottom rung of the League table and have not the finances available to improve their position, he turns a deaf ear,

³⁶ John Bentley Circular to Football League Clubs, quoted in *Athletic News*, 11 June 1906.

and no helping hand in the shape of an appeal is issued, and he leaves them to sink.

Significantly, Bentley responded to this criticism by pointing out that there were economic as well as sentimental reasons behind his appeal, because a club with novice players would be unable to compete at the required level and 'anyone conversant with club management is aware that a team beaten week after week ceases to be a drawing power, especially away'.³⁷ In general, however, the League steered away from this type of centralised control over player movement, leaving the transfer system and the maximum wage to limit the concentration of football talent which might otherwise develop in a free and unregulated labour market.

3. Subsidising the Poor: Income Sharing and Mutual Support

Like the maximum wage, income sharing became a highly contentious issue which tended to divide the wealthy big city clubs and their less well-off compatriots. The original Football League scheme drawn up by William McGregor and a small band of club representatives in March 1888 had included a rule stipulating that all gates be pooled but this was subsequently rejected in favour of home clubs keeping the gate receipts and providing a small guarantee of £12 to the visitors.³⁸ This arrangement, too, was abandoned within two years due to the massive increases in gate money and a series of proposals in the early 1890s and then again in 1901 and 1908 for gate receipts to be equally divided were similarly dismissed.³⁹ Indeed, it is evident that prior to the First World War there were relatively few calls to introduce income redistribution. James Catton certainly believed that the absence of gate-sharing was the League's primary weakness but even McGregor could accept by the mid-1900s that the pooling of gates would probably in the early days have created 'friction and unrest' between the richer and poorer clubs and that it would now 'lead to badly managed clubs being bailed out by the well-managed'.⁴⁰ The Scottish Football

³⁷ *Athletic News*, 18 June, 2 July 1906.

³⁸ Sutcliffe *et al.*, *Football League*, pp. 3, 5.

³⁹ Catton, *The Real Football*, p. 87; Report of Football League AGM in *Athletic News*, 20 May 1901; Minutes of Football League, 29 May 1908.

⁴⁰ Catton Folders, E-F, Notes for a speech on 'The Football League', undated, p. 500c; McGregor, 'Origin and Future', p. 5.

League, in contrast, had adopted gate-sharing arrangements from the beginning, although the two-thirds home to one-third away distribution it initially settled for was evidently insufficient to save clubs with near village populations like Dumbarton, Renton and Vale of Leven from extinction. By 1905 it had opted for an equal division of gate-money in order to subsidise the clubs with low attendances and provide some competition for the dominant trio of Rangers, Celtic and Hearts.⁴¹ No doubt the relative equality of the Football League via wage and transfer restrictions persuaded the executive not to intervene in this sensitive area of gate-money for the time being.

Opposition to the principle of gate-sharing was based largely on the long-standing assumption that this form of income was purely the product of the home club's endeavour. In this view, crowds came to watch the home side play - not the visitors - and thus it was logical that it should keep *its own* gate receipts as reward for investment in players, ground facilities and other good management practices. Indeed, the issue of ground facilities was particularly sensitive for those clubs who by the early 1900s were beginning to erect covered stands and make other ground improvements (see chapter 9). As a Liverpool director put it in 1901: 'clubs which had provided covered accommodation... should reap the rewards. Why should they be called upon to divide with, say Bury, who had little or no covered accommodation?'⁴² W. R. Clayton of Everton - a club which had spent over £50,000 on two new stands and other developments between 1907 and 1909 alone to create 'by far the best equipped ground in England'⁴³ - similarly objected to the idea of enterprising and modernising clubs paying 'out of their gates for the up-keep of the so-called weaker organisations'.⁴⁴

It took the outbreak of war in 1914, however, to force the richer clubs to accept income redistribution, initially through the mechanism of the Relief Fund. The intention was that each club would pay two and a half per cent of its gate, and players between 5 and 15 per cent of their wages, to a central Fund administered by the Management Committee 'for the purpose of assisting necessitous clubs' who had

⁴¹ R. M. Connell, 'The Scottish Football League and its History' in *Book of Football*, p. 267.

⁴² Report of Football League AGM in *Athletic News*, 20 May 1901.

⁴³ Inglis, *Football Grounds*, p. 214.

⁴⁴ *Athletic News*, 7 August 1916.

particularly suffered from the drop in attendances. Sutcliffe estimated that £8,000 was needed to help 14 clubs who were in particular financial difficulties and indeed 18 of the 40 League members applied for assistance from the Fund at some point during the 1914/15 season.⁴⁵ In introducing the scheme, the executive had returned to the established rhetoric of solidarity and mutual support:

The loyalty of the League clubs cannot be questioned. At heart we are faithful adherents to the League spirit. In a critical period in the history of the game devotion to the League is of paramount importance. Our personal and individual interests must be sacrificed to the common good... The strong clubs must come to the help of the weak.⁴⁶

Yet this rhetoric could at times appear flimsy in the light of the behaviour of clubs like Derby County, which was forced by the Committee to pay back a sum of £350 received from the Relief Fund when it had actually made a profit that year of over £500.⁴⁷ The Fund was dissolved at the end of the 1914/15 season and, for the first time, a system of pooling gate receipts was introduced in the newly organised Lancashire and Midland sections.

In the Principal Competition which lasted the first half of the season, clubs retained their own gate receipts as before but the Subsidiary Competition from January to April was formulated on a more equitable basis, with the Midland section deciding to split the gate equally between the home and away club and the Lancashire group requiring each member to contribute half of the gate to a common pool to be shared equally by the 12 clubs at the end of the season. *Athletic News* applauded the willingness of clubs to help 'each other to survive in times of peril' and enthusiastically backed such schemes which exemplified the 'the true League principle of mutual support'.⁴⁸ There is little doubt that the less wealthy clubs benefited substantially from these pooling arrangements. Table 7.8 shows that in the Lancashire Competition two-thirds of the members derived more income through pooling than they would have gained under the previous system. Indeed, Blackpool publicly thanked its richer neighbours for

⁴⁵ Sutcliffe *et al.*, *Football League*, pp. 85-86; Inglis, *League Football*, p. 95.

⁴⁶ Quoted in Sutcliffe *et al.*, *Football League*, p. 83.

⁴⁷ Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 28 June 1915; Report of Football League AGM in *Athletic News*, 26 July 1915.

⁴⁸ *Athletic News*, 21 February, 17 January 1916.

'falling into line over the pooling system' while the Preston chairman admitted that his club would have had to leave the League without the money received from the pool.⁴⁹ Everton, Liverpool and Manchester City, each of whom lost over £450 as a result of the pooling arrangement, were evidently less favourable. At the 1916 annual meeting these richer clubs masterminded a return to the pre-war system, partly by threatening to establish an independent breakaway section if pooling was continued (see chapter 4). For the Everton chairman, W. R. Clayton, pooling was contrary to established League principles and practices, whether its purpose was equality or survival:

...from the inception of the League there has never, until the war started, been any pooling of gates. When clubs have applied for membership of the League, they have always been asked about the support they can guarantee, financial and otherwise. Had they for any moment expressed the slightest doubt as to the support upon which they could rely they would not have secured admission... Under these circumstances why should these clubs come to us now and ask for a proportion of our takings[?]⁵⁰

By January, however, a series of extremely low gates led Bury to organise a conference of 'clubs with inadequate support' in Lancashire in an attempt to convince their wealthier rivals to agree to the re-introduction of gate pooling. They failed but the 'big three' Lancastrian clubs did make voluntary contributions of £200 each into a Fund administered by League president John McKenna to provide financial aid 'as occasion requires, to clubs in need'.⁵¹ In the Midland section, Birmingham donated £100 while Rotherham County, Chesterfield, Sheffield Wednesday and Sheffield United gave £50 to a similar central Fund for clubs 'in financial difficulties'.⁵²

⁴⁹ *Athletic News*, 12 June, 29 May 1916.

⁵⁰ *Athletic News*, 7 August 1916.

⁵¹ *Athletic News*, 1, 15, 22 January 1917.

⁵² Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 14 February 1917.

Table 7.8 Gains and losses under the Lancashire Subsidiary Competition pooling system, 1916.

Club	Amount Paid into Pool (in pounds)	Gain or loss* (in pounds)
Liverpool	861	- 513
Everton	809	- 461
Manchester City	806	- 458
Manchester United	372	- 24
Stockport	261	87
Burnley	222	126
Blackpool	213	135
Bolton Wanderers	156	191
Oldham Athletic	155	193
Preston North End	148	200
Bury	134	214
Southport	55	294

* Each club received £348 from the pool.
Source: *Athletic News*, 8 May 1916.

Despite this, the pressure from below to return to some form of pooling or division of gate-money for the 1917/18 season continued to mount. Although the Sheffield clubs, amongst others, remained convinced that there 'should be no pooling whatever'⁵³, the poorer clubs were able to enlist the support of McKenna and other members of the executive. In fact, it was McKenna who devised the scheme for 20 per cent of the home club's net gate (including stand charges) to be paid to the visitors in the main competition and the same percentage to be pooled in the supplementary matches. There is little doubt that without the president's advocacy of the scheme it would not have been accepted.⁵⁴ Clayton, for one, 'expressed his confirmed objection to pooling as a principle' but contended 'that the rich were consenting parties to the President's plan because it was wartime'; the Sheffield United Committee also assented to the scheme 'as a temporary arrangement'.⁵⁵ It is, moreover, worth noting that Nottingham Forest's more radical plan for one common pool for both sections was rejected by the Lancashire members, who were not prepared to extend financial aid to the midland clubs (see chapter 4).

⁵³ Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 14 March 1917.

⁵⁴ See James Catton's retrospective comments on this in *All Sports Weekly*, 11 September 1926.

⁵⁵ Report of Football League AGM in *Athletic News*, 17 July 1917; Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 25 June 1917.

The ideology of mutual support and co-operation was further cemented as official League policy when the competition proper resumed after the war. This became evident, firstly, in the arrangement established by Sutcliffe to enable the doubling of players' expenses to £2 in January 1919. The League executive was convinced that only a handful of clubs could afford such an increase but persuaded its members to accept a scheme whereby the ten best supported clubs sent in weekly contributions to subsidise 17 of the most 'needy clubs'.⁵⁶ According to Simon Inglis, this was 'the typical Sutcliffe formula: the rich helping the poor, to keep the family strong'.⁵⁷ Secondly, Sutcliffe and others began to advocate the division of gate-money as both a permanent measure and, significantly, as a visiting club's right rather than as an act of benevolence on the part of the richer clubs. Sutcliffe certainly believed that 'the visiting team provided half the attraction. They do as much to draw the gate as the home team'.⁵⁸ When in early 1920 a Birmingham director proposed the creation of a 'charitable pool' administered by the Management Committee instead of the 20 per cent to visitors, the idea was rejected outright by the executive and the majority of club representatives. *Athletic News* summed up this change in attitude: 'Clubs do not ask for charity. Every team that visits Birmingham helps Birmingham to draw its gate, and it is the acknowledgement of this right that clubs ask for.'⁵⁹ However, at the same time the visitor's share of the gate was modified so that the 20 per cent applied only to the 9d. basic admission fee for each spectator and not also to the stand and enclosure receipts as had operated previously, a move aimed to pacify those clubs who had spent heavily on stand accommodation. This came as a major blow to clubs like Bury, who estimated that they were only likely to draw £150 per season from the new system, compared with the £750 received the season before.⁶⁰

By the mid-1920s the principle of gate pooling could no longer be considered an experiment: it had become enshrined as League policy. There was evidently some pressure to abandon the system in 1923 but McKenna was adamant that 'they ought to

⁵⁶ Report of Football League SGM in *Athletic News*, 20 January 1919.

⁵⁷ Inglis, *League Football*, p. 112.

⁵⁸ *Athletic News*, 13 January 1919.

⁵⁹ *Athletic News*, 22 March 1920.

⁶⁰ Sheffield United FC Programme, 3 April 1920. Home clubs were subsequently required to pay a small fee (initially 1d.) per head for all season tickets issued.

see the industrial cloud raised before they took away that assistance which the poorer clubs were wanting'.⁶¹ At the next annual meeting the Management Committee formally proposed the continuation of the 20 per cent allocation to visiting sides and there was no concerted attempt to remove the rule during the remainder of the period.⁶² It may be that the richer clubs were prepared to put up with the system because they were paying out relatively small sums. The account books of Sheffield United, for example, show that the club rarely paid out or received a balance of over £500 during the course of a season and even a poorly-supported club like Oldham Athletic - who spent time in the first, second and third division north between the wars - only made a profit of over £1,000 on the pool exchange once (see Appendix 12). After dropping into the third division in 1923/24, Wolverhampton Wanderers could bemoan the fact that it had to send out cheques to visitors twice as large as it received in return but such instances were rare, not least because pooling operated strictly *within* divisions and there was no attempt to redistribute income across the League as a whole.⁶³ Indeed, these limitations contributed to proposals in the early 1930s aimed at increasing the percentage to visiting clubs. In 1931, Derby County attempted to have the 20 per cent increased to 40 per cent to help clubs suffering from reduced attendances as a result of industrial depression and as a general means of 'levelling up things between clubs in more ways than one'. Although the Derby president considered his proposal 'both democratic and fair' it was subsequently withdrawn for technical reasons and when it was put to the next annual meeting Arsenal issued a counter-proposal to abolish pooling altogether; the Management Committee, in turn, successfully stepped in with its own conciliatory proposal to preserve the 20 per cent pool.⁶⁴

Support for the idea of extended pooling arrangements was most pronounced among the associate members in the third division sections. As well as advocating the doubling of visitors' percentages in order to help out the 'poorer brethren' and keep the competitions going, both the northern and southern sections agreed to pool the

⁶¹ Minutes of Football League, 28 May 1923 (AGM).

⁶² Minutes of Football League, 12 May 1924.

⁶³ Wolverhampton Wanderers FC Programme, 6 October 1923.

⁶⁴ *Athletic News*, 25 May 1931; Minutes of Football League, 1 June 1931 (AGM); *Topical Times*, 11 June 1932.

expenses of match officials so as to reduce the burden on clubs like Plymouth Argyle and Carlisle United which were geographically isolated.⁶⁵ Throughout the period clubs were also entitled to make individual pooling arrangements, although this tended to be restricted to local rivals of corresponding wealth and support. Aston Villa and West Bromwich Albion, for instance, agreed to pool the receipts from their derby matches during the 1911/12 season while Arsenal and West Ham United made similar arrangements in 1925/26. Rather surprisingly, given their close relations with each other in most areas, the Sheffield clubs chose not to pool gates but instead made sure that home fixtures on holiday dates were alternated each season.⁶⁶

Pooling aside, there was no formal mechanism for subsidising financially weak clubs. No attempt was made to adapt the Relief Fund to peacetime conditions and, unlike in the Northern Rugby Union, financial assistance to clubs in need continued to be resisted during the economic slump of the early 1920s and the depression of the 1930s.⁶⁷ In general, the executive agreed with Clayton's view that each club should support itself financially. Sutcliffe even advised the prospective third division northern members in 1921 that 'Every club must be prepared to set their own house in order and rely on their own resources'.⁶⁸ But cross-subsidisation could also take more spontaneous forms, through direct financial assistance via cash transfers between League members.⁶⁹ Appeal funds organised by clubs with money problems were a particular feature of the period before 1914. The Aston Villa minute books indicate that that club was among the keenest of philanthropists, donating £50 to Wolves in 1901 and 20 guineas to Burslem Port Vale a year later, although similar appeals by Bolton and Leicester Fosse apparently fell on deaf ears.⁷⁰ When second division West Bromwich Albion launched an appeal in early 1905, a local correspondent wrote that it was 'the duty of every wealthy club in the League to assist the Albion to turn the corner'.⁷¹ Villa had, by this point, already sent its neighbour a cheque for 100 guineas

⁶⁵ Sheffield United FC Programme, 5 March 1932; Minutes of Football League (Third Division Southern Section), 26 March 1923; Minutes of Football League (AGM), 8 June 1925.

⁶⁶ Minutes of West Ham United FC, 9 June 1925; Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 1 September 1926; *Athletic News*, 3 July 1911.

⁶⁷ Moorhouse, *A People's Game*, p. 179.

⁶⁸ *Athletic News*, 21 March 1921.

⁶⁹ See Arnold and Benveniste, 'Cross Subsidisation', p. 15.

⁷⁰ Minutes of Aston Villa FC, 18 May 1900, 14 March, 9 May 1901, 26 March 1902.

⁷¹ *Athletic News*, 6 February 1905.

with the wish that 'your good old club once more places [itself] upon a sound footing financially'; Everton later donated 20 guineas while Small Heath, who were reputedly unable to afford a donation, contributed its share of the Birmingham Senior Cup Final gate receipts.⁷² Sheffield United, on the other hand, refused to fund Albion, a stance the Committee maintained when faced with similar appeals from struggling clubs up to the 1930s.⁷³ In different ways, the actions of each of these clubs lent support to N. L. Jackson's assertion that 'only self-interest, or self-preservation will persuade the richer clubs to devote a portion of their wealth to keeping their poorer brethren alive'.⁷⁴ Indeed, the apparent selflessness of Aston Villa undoubtedly betrayed a fundamental economic logic: matches against local rivals drew some of the highest crowds and thus by subsidising Wolves and Albion, Villa was hoping to secure future financial rewards for itself.⁷⁵

Clubs also often helped to relieve the financial burdens of fellow members less directly by conditionally loaning money or players, staggering the payment of transfer bills or agreeing to play fund-raising matches. In 1910 Aston Villa, for example, was prepared to loan neighbours Birmingham £250 while taking 'one or more' of Birmingham's players as a form of security until the loan was repaid.⁷⁶ Other clubs who were unable to afford large transfer fees were occasionally loaned players for short periods or offered favourable terms for their transfer, although such arrangements were again generally between members in the same city or district. While the Management Committee encouraged clubs to conduct transfer transactions by immediate cash payments and explicitly condemned those who gave post-dated cheques or paid in instalments, such practices remained widespread and generally accepted by both buyers and sellers. Hence when third division Hull City was unable to pay the full £1,000 fee for Matthews - a player on Sheffield United's retain list playing in Ireland for Shamrock Rovers - in October 1931 it was agreed that £350

⁷² AV, 1905 File (uncatalogued), Ramsay to WBA Directors, 2 February 1905; *Athletic News*, 13 February 1905.

⁷³ Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 7 February 1905, 24 September 1913 (Appeal by Bury), 15 June 1936 (Appeal by Notts County).

⁷⁴ Quoted in Tischler, *Footballers and Businessmen*, p. 65.

⁷⁵ In the two seasons prior to their relegation, the visits of West Bromwich Albion provided the second highest home attendances for Aston Villa. David Goodyear and Tony Matthews, *Aston Villa: A Complete Record, 1874-1992*, Derby, 1992.

⁷⁶ Minutes of Aston Villa FC, 8, 15 February, 1 March 1910.

would be paid up front and the remainder at the end of that season; likewise, in June 1935 West Ham sold Anderson to Chester for £150, to be paid in three £50 instalments at the end of September, October and November.⁷⁷ The action in 1908 of the Sheffield United Committee in agreeing to Birmingham's request to delay the full payment of an outstanding transfer bill for six months 'on account of their financial position' was perhaps more surprising as both clubs were competing at the time to avoid relegation to the second division.⁷⁸ In other cases where direct subsidisation was considered improper or impracticable, clubs often followed Small Heath's example in donating a proportion of gate receipts to struggling neighbours or playing a friendly match for fund-raising purposes. In 1928 Burnley, for example, assisted Nelson by playing one of its prestigious close season ties against Scottish League opposition at the third division club's ground and donating all the proceeds to the survival fund.⁷⁹

4. 'Friends and Rivals': Friendship, Mutuality and the League Spirit

These examples of financial assistance between League members must also be interpreted in the context of wider expressions of mutual support and friendship which permeated the private and public relationships between club officials and directors. In many ways the equalisation policies themselves, and the language used by officials to justify and defend them, can be tied in with the philosophy and practice of the friendly societies of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁸⁰ Certainly the friendly society idea of pooling resources to protect all members of the group was popular amongst the League executive - if not with all its clubs - from the early part of the century and the rhetoric of the rich and strong helping the poor and weak was a common feature of the public statements and newspaper columns of Sutcliffe, Bentley, McKenna and others. To this extent, Tomlinson's metaphorical description of the Football League as a

⁷⁷ Minutes of Football League, 11 January 1926; Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 21 October 1931; Minutes of West Ham United FC, 25 June 1935.

⁷⁸ Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 15 March 1908. By the 1920s the payment of transfer bills over a six month period (with an agreed rate of interest) had become established practice even among clubs competing directly in the same division. For examples see Minutes of West Ham United FC, 3 May, 21 June 1927; Minutes of Walsall FC, 15 January 1935.

⁷⁹ *Topical Times*, 10 March 1928.

⁸⁰ See Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class*, pp. 458-63; Morris, 'Clubs, societies and associations', pp. 416-17.

‘family and friendly society’ driven by a ‘philosophy of mutual protection’ has some validity.⁸¹ Yet the sentiments of friendship and mutuality which undeniably did exist between clubs were rather more ambivalent than this suggests and were never simply imposed on clubs from above.

In his account of an annual dinner of League managers and secretaries from the late 1930s, the FA Councillor and former secretary William Pickford noted the importance of sociability and fellowship:

Here were gathered together in the old British fashion some hundreds of men who run the clubs, the sergeants, orderlies and corporals of the League, plus a mixture of officers i.e. directors and rank and file. It was the ‘close season’ and these henchmen of the game... were greeting each other like old friends, club rivalry temporarily suspended, slapping one another on the back and exchanging jokes and reminiscences...

I really got a better idea of what the League meant than ever before during the many years in which I have watched the start and growth of that gigantic organisation.⁸²

Peter Bailey has analysed the significance of similar occasions involving displays of friendship and its associated rhetoric in the business of music-hall management during the late nineteenth century. The benefit night, in particular, developed partly as ‘a great celebration of fraternal good feeling’ at which rival proprietors could meet, renew long-standing friendships or reconcile differences.⁸³ In League football there were parallel social events arranged after a Cup or League success or to mark the anniversary of a club’s foundation. Thus the West Ham directors attended a Jubilee dinner at Tottenham Hotspur in 1927 and celebratory dinners hosted by Arsenal in 1933 and 1934 as well as a banquet in 1935 following the north London club’s third consecutive championship success.⁸⁴

It was also common for letters of congratulation to be sent to the champions of each division and the cup winners and even notes of condolence to relegated sides. Aston Villa’s congratulatory message to Newcastle United following the Tyneside club’s

⁸¹ Tomlinson, ‘North and South’, pp. 35, 33.

⁸² Pickford, *A Glance Back at the FA Council*, p. 52.

⁸³ Bailey, ‘Community of Friends’, p. 43.

⁸⁴ Minutes of West Ham United FC, 31 May 1927, 2 May 1933, 24 April 1934, 29 April 1935.

victory over Villa in the 1924 FA Cup Final had a heightened significance due to the fact that relations had been soured by Newcastle's decision to send out a weakened team for a League fixture at Villa Park on the Monday before the final (see chapter 9). The secretary of the cup winners wrote back to assure his counterpart that 'through no fault of Newcastle United will our friendly relations be severed' and that 'friendly feeling will only be more cemented through the courteous action of your Club'.⁸⁵ West Bromwich Albion actually included a public message to Stoke - which was then second bottom of the first division - in its club programme of 27 January 1923:

Stoke have our sympathies - we are hoping to see them rise considerably in the League table, for Stoke and the Albion have been friends and rivals for very many years, and we do not like to see any of our Staffordshire or local clubs in distress.⁸⁶

This language of friendship was clearly important in emphasising the close ties and relations between clubs which, as we have seen, were both sporting competitors and economic partners.⁸⁷ And friendship was also publicly displayed at times of bereavement: representatives of the Liverpool, Blackburn Rovers, Manchester United, Oldham Athletic, Manchester City, Bury, Blackpool, Woolwich Arsenal and Fulham clubs all attended the funeral in 1912 of Preston director and short-time Management Committee member Tom Houghton, while five of these plus a further nine clubs sent wreaths. Similarly, in spite of the history of personal animosity between the two directorates, when Liverpool chairman John Houlding died in 1905 the Everton team still wore black armbands during its next fixture.⁸⁸

Some local clubs developed even closer links through mutual arrangements, regular meetings of directors and even joint policy initiatives. For example, the major Birmingham and Black Country League clubs - Aston Villa, Wolves, Birmingham and West Bromwich Albion - established an agreement that all officials and players were to have free entry to each other's ground if they wished on matchdays.⁸⁹ The

⁸⁵ Minutes of Aston Villa FC, Letter from Newcastle United FC to Ramsay, 1 May 1924.

⁸⁶ *Albion News*, 27 January 1923.

⁸⁷ Vamplew, *Pay Up*, p. 112.

⁸⁸ Tom Houghton's obituary in *Preston Guardian*, 21 September 1921; Mason, *Blues and the Reds*, p. 18.

⁸⁹ Minutes of Aston Villa FC, 6 September 1910.

Merseyside rivals went further by publishing a joint match programme called the 'Everton and Liverpool Official Football Programme' which lasted from 1904 until 1935.⁹⁰ Relations between Sheffield United and Wednesday were perhaps closer still. Not only did they share the same chairman - FA president Charles Clegg - for most of the period but they tended to take joint decisions on the questions of bonuses and wages, voted together at League meetings and also ensured that entrance fees and season-ticket prices were uniform.⁹¹ Hence Wednesday's decision in 1922 to depart from the mutual agreement on season-ticket prices and reserve match admission naturally brought forth immediate criticism from the United Committee. The club minute books indicate that it was unable to understand its neighbours' action in making such a change 'without instructing... us' and embarked on a series of negotiations to restore the status quo. Good relations were quickly resumed and in 1932 the two clubs actually made enquiries into the possibility of joint United-Wednesday season-tickets although the idea was soon dropped as impracticable.⁹²

The rhetoric of friendship, however, could not disguise occasional disagreements or the breakdown of club relations. When even neighbouring clubs came into conflict over issues like player transfers or compensation claims for rearranged fixtures, the philosophy of mutual protection often appeared illusory while the language of friendship could be easily discarded. Certainly Aston Villa and Birmingham could not hide their ill-feeling towards each other during a dispute over fixture allocation in 1907. At Birmingham's annual meeting, W. W. Hart accused Villa of being inflexible in insisting that his club should not play on Christmas Day afternoon when Villa had a morning fixture; Fred Rinder countered by sarcastically speaking of Hart as 'the man who wants peace'. The dispute moved a local journalist to ask if it was not 'too much to expect [the two clubs] to be neighbourly'.⁹³ Enduring friendships also depend on mutual trust and this became an important element in inter-club relations, especially in cases where one club relied on the word of another regarding the character or fitness

⁹⁰ Mason, *Blues and the Reds*, p. 18.

⁹¹ Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 9 September 1908, 20 August 1912, 3 June 1919, 1 July 1932.

⁹² Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 16 August, 13 September 1923; 23 November 1932.

⁹³ *Athletic News*, 10 June 1907.

of a new player. In most instances, co-operation between clubs on matters of this kind ran smoothly. Aston Villa, for example, always wrote to clubs releasing a player whom it was interested in registering in order to gain insights into his suitability. One letter to Sheffield United relating to its former goalkeeper J. T. Mitchell read: 'As we know nothing of his ability or habits I am writing to you to find out all I can about him and whether you consider he would suit us.' It added that 'anything you care to say will be esteemed a favour and treated in strict confidence'.⁹⁴

However, an interesting example of how this type of trust between clubs could break down involved a prolonged dispute between Nottingham Forest and Sheffield United in 1911. The acrimony began when the Forest board accused certain United directors of misleading them 'both as to the ability and character' of Jack Smith, an ex-United player whom Forest had bought without seeing play and on the basis of the recommendation of his former employers. After United had denied Forest's claim, the latter club refused to pay the agreed transfer fee and the matter was taken to an FA Commission which eventually ruled in favour of the Sheffield club. Relations became further embittered when the Forest secretary made public statements 'affecting the honour of the [United] directors', to which United demanded a formal withdrawal and apology. After months of public and private feuding, the Forest board eventually withdrew its accusations and paid Smith's fee.⁹⁵

5. Conclusion

Existing accounts of the internal dynamics of sporting leagues, especially in terms of the promotion of equalisation policies, have focused almost exclusively on economic relationships and motives. Admittedly, it is difficult to understand the dynamics of sporting combinations *without* perceiving them as cartels which effectively formalised the fundamental economic interdependence between individual clubs. Looked at historically, however, such interpretations are inadequate, as they provide only a partial picture of the complicated influences which led the Football League to adopt

⁹⁴ AV, 52/82, Ramsay to J. Nicholson, 13 June 1919. For a reply to a similar letter from another club see Ramsay to H. Allcock, 19 June 1919.

⁹⁵ Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 4, 26 April, 2, 6 June 1911.

schemes designed to redistribute income among its membership and convinced clubs to assist others financially. Above all it is important to recognise that while economic considerations were often to the fore, the policy-makers at Preston and elsewhere were not economists but administrators, and even those who ran businesses outside football tended to adopt a different set of perspectives in their sporting activity. The promotion and relegation system, the maximum wage and the 20 per cent contribution to visiting teams were therefore not designed primarily to increase profits but rather to ensure the viability of competing clubs within the context of a fair competition.

It is helpful here to relate the pursuit of these various informal and formal equalisation policies to the historiography of philanthropy as well as anthropological studies of 'giving' behaviour. Most interpretations have stressed that philanthropic aid and the giving of gifts are invariably more complex than simple acts of kindness.⁹⁶ As Alan J. Kidd has argued: 'although gifts might appear voluntary and freely given they are in fact obligatory and interested. There is no such thing as a disinterested or free gift: in this sense, giving is never altruistic'.⁹⁷ Indeed, reciprocity is seen as central to the process of giving, in that few gifts are sent without the hope of some form of material or moral return. While most forms of 'giving' between Football League clubs were wrapped up in formalised regulations, they appear nonetheless to follow this pattern. Reciprocity was, of course, central to the arrangement of the 20 per cent rule: each club knew that its 'gift' would be returned later the same season. More broadly speaking, the wealthier clubs were often prepared to accept policies which constrained their own economic dominance and to give directly to their poorer brethren precisely because the existence of these clubs as competitive rivals remained vital to their own long-term security. Such philanthropy was thus essentially self-interested. Assisting or supporting the weak was part of the broader notion of mutuality which permeated much of the League's policy from its beginnings, even though the periodic resistance of member clubs meant that it was never fully realised in practice.

⁹⁶ Alan J. Kidd, 'Philanthropy and the "Social History Paradigm"', *Social History*, 21, 2, 1996, pp. 180-92. Also see Frank Prochaska, *The Voluntary Impulse: Philanthropy in Modern Britain*, London, 1988; 'Philanthropy' in *Cambridge Social History*, vol. 3, pp. 357-93.

⁹⁷ Kidd, 'Philanthropy', p. 183.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE LEAGUE AND INTERNATIONAL FOOTBALL

Although the Football League defined itself from the beginning as a self-contained, inward-looking and 'a frankly selfish' organisation¹, its very success spawned imitators in other countries and necessitated the development of international relationships. Before 1914 these were generally restricted to the home countries of Britain, especially Scotland and Ireland, whose leagues were both established in 1890. In the inter-war period, however, the growing popularity of the game led to its professionalisation and the creation of numerous regional and national competitions based on the league model throughout Europe, South and North America. Though recent work has qualified the notion of continental football as simply a British export, the influence of English (as well as Scottish) teams, players and coaches was undoubtedly central to these developments.² Nevertheless, the English football authorities themselves have been portrayed as aloof and marginal in this respect, paying little attention to the continental game and establishing only intermittent contact with international bodies. Indeed, in his history of British football, James Walvin described the years from 1915 to 1939 as the era of 'the insular game'.³ The Football League, in many ways, exemplified this insularity. While it developed a formal dialogue, as well as administrative links, with the other British associations and leagues, it made no similar contacts outside Britain and, unlike the FA, did little to encourage its members to do so. In fact the Management Committee tended to regard international football as an irrelevance at best, and to perceive non-English clubs and associations in the first instance as rivals rather than friends; posing a potential threat to the League and its players.

This chapter is not concerned only with the League's international relations at a formal, administrative level. In the context of the FA's self-imposed exclusion from

¹ Comment of John Lewis in *Football and Sports Special*, 16 January 1909.

² Pierre Lanfranchi, 'Exporting Football: Notes on the Development of Football in Europe' in Richard Giulianotti and John Williams (eds), *Game Without Frontiers: Football, Identity and Modernity*, Aldershot, 1994, pp. 23-45; Mason, 'Some Englishmen and Scotsmen Abroad', pp. 67-82.

³ Walvin, *People's Game*, chapter 6.

the Federation Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) before 1905, between 1919 and 1924 and then from 1928 until the Second World War, Football League clubs were obliged to develop their own contacts and form individual networks of relationships on the international stage. This was facilitated through the practice of close season club tours to the Continent and sometimes beyond, and was increasingly complimented between the wars by the staging of international club and representative fixtures on home soil. It was the issue of labour migration, however, which remained the primary concern of the League and its clubs throughout this period and shaped their perceptions of the international game. The flow of football talent from the peripheral nations of the United Kingdom to English clubs had been a distinctive feature of the game prior to the creation of the Football League and Scottish players in particular became proportionately over-represented at most League clubs even before the turn of the century. While the movement of football labour within the United Kingdom tended to be a one-way flow towards England, the process was reversed as professional leagues developed outside Britain from the 1920s. The loss of registered players to the emerging leagues in the United States during the 1920s and France in the 1930s became a highly contentious issue among club and League officials mainly because no agreement or transfer payment was necessary. In this way, international developments threatened to undermine the Football League's control over its own labour force and to compromise its much-valued autonomy.

1. The League and British 'International' Football: Scotland, Ireland, Wales

In common with many other spheres of political, economic or social development, association football in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was emphatically not a purely English product, even if the administrative structures of the game developed there first. The structural anomaly of four separate associations and three individual (and nominally national) leagues within a single political state has naturally led most students of the game to adopt a type of 'four nations history' interpretation and to reject as misleading the very concept of *British* football.⁴ Yet, it

⁴ See H. F. Moorhouse, 'One State, Several Countries: Soccer and Identities in a "United" Kingdom', *EUI Colloquium Papers*, Florence, 1989, pp. 1-14. For the broader historical debate see the editorial by Raphael Samuel, 'British Dimensions: "Four Nations History"', *History Workshop Journal*, 40, 1995, pp. iii-xxii.

is noteworthy that in football's rudimentary stage, prior to the League's creation in 1888, associations and competitions in Britain were not separated according to national boundaries. The FA saw itself from its formation in 1863 as much more than an English national body. Hence in the same way as colonial clubs and associations were incorporated, the FA allowed Scottish, Welsh and even Irish clubs to affiliate, a situation which led in 1881 to a firm rejection of the proposal to rename it 'The English Association'. Non-English clubs were also included in early FA Cup competitions. Scotland's premier club Queen's Park entered the inaugural 1871 competition and Scottish clubs continued to participate until 1887 while Irish clubs only withdrew after the creation of their own league in 1890. Welsh clubs, in contrast, continued to enter English competitions and were even awarded a direct seat on the FA Council up until the late 1880s.⁵

The Football League was likewise never conceived by its founding fathers as a national or a strictly English competition. The absence of the epithet 'English' in its title is instructive in this respect, as it indicated the League's willingness to include non-English, particularly Scottish or Welsh, members. The creation of the Scottish Football League two years later precluded the entry of clubs north of the border but for Welsh clubs there was no national league to divert their attention and many continued to look towards English competition. For the clubs from the larger towns and cities in the principality this initially involved membership of the Southern League but with the League's expansion after the First World War, Cardiff City were elected to the second division while Merthyr, Newport, Swansea Town and Wrexham became associate members in the new third division sections. Indeed, the Management Committee had to insist in 1921 'that it was time their clubs ceased advertising their matches as English League matches. They were the Football League and they were proud of their title and what they had achieved'.⁶ And the national constituency of these leagues apparently remained fluid enough to encourage Newcastle United to volunteer the inclusion of its reserve team along with another English club, Berwick Rangers, when two members withdrew from the second

⁵ Green, *History of the FA*, pp. 76, 90.

⁶ Minutes of Football League, 30 May 1921.

division of the Scottish League during the 1932/33 season.⁷ Moreover, both the administrative and footballing personnel of the Football League always contained a large non-English contingent. William McGregor, the founder and first president, was a Scot, as was Committeeman John Cameron, while the long-standing president of the pre- and inter-war years, John McKenna, hailed from Ireland. Similarly, the earliest League teams were composed of a mixture of indigenous talent and players from the other British nations. Clubs from Lancashire, the north-east and the midlands were engaging Scots in considerable numbers throughout the 1880s and 1890s and the most successful teams in the formative years of the League championship - such as Preston's 'Invincibles' of the 1888/89 and 1889/90 seasons, Aston Villa's double winners of 1896/97 and Sunderland's 'Team of All the Talents' which lasted from 1889-98 - invariably included at least three or four non-English nationals.⁸

i) The Establishment of Administrative Relations

For the Football League, recognition of its counterparts across both the border and the Irish Sea was marked initially by the arrangement of Inter-League representative fixtures. Such matches came to serve a dual function: they established and then consolidated good relations between the competing bodies and also generated additional income for administrative purposes. As Inter-League matches developed in the twentieth century into annual sporting events they also acquired important social dimensions. They became a means of acknowledging the administrative links and mutuality between the different leagues, with the arrangement of joint meetings and even luncheons, to which representatives of clubs and the relevant national associations were invited.⁹ But these representative fixtures remained primarily a money-making venture. During the 1890s and well into the twentieth century the receipts from Inter-League matches constituted the major source of Football League income; for the Scottish and Irish Leagues they were indispensable in financial

⁷ Crampsey, *First 100 Years*, p. 95. Both applications were rejected and the leaving clubs were not replaced. Berwick was eventually admitted for the 1955/56 season and remain the only English club competing in the Scottish League although others, including Gateshead in 1960, attempted to join.

⁸ See Appleton, *Hotbed of Soccer*, pp. 175-84; Walvin, *People's Game*, pp. 83-84.

⁹ See Report of McKenna's speech prior to the Inter-League match against the Irish League in *Athletic News*, 23 October 1911; Minutes of FA International Selection Committee, 29 March 1920; Minutes of West Ham United FC, 28 October 1930.

terms.¹⁰ Attendances were always higher when the fixture was held in Scotland, establishing it as probably 'the second most important game in the football calendar' north of the border, surpassed only by the Scotland-England international itself.¹¹ While the FA had stymied a proposed Inter-League match with the Scots in 1891, the following year the first in the series of annual games took place at Bolton and by 1894 the Irish League had also been granted a match.

Notwithstanding the establishment of contacts on the field of play, relations with the other British leagues during the 1890s remained unresolved and in a state of flux. Glasgow Celtic, for instance, found itself caught up in the Football League's boycott against outside clubs when it was accused of poaching a Lincoln City player in 1894, in spite of the fact that he was no longer engaged by the English club.¹² Indeed the constant movement of players across the border in both directions created considerable difficulties, especially in the many cases where players were registered (if not always contracted) by both Football and Scottish League clubs. These problems were partially resolved in 1897 when the two leagues agreed to 'the mutual recognition of players' registrations and clubs' rights in players'.¹³ Henceforth Scottish players with English clubs could only move back north under regulated transfer procedures while those engaged with members of both Leagues became the joint property of those clubs. William Wilton, the Scottish League secretary, plainly acknowledged the significance of this agreement: it meant 'the practical amalgamation of two Leagues, involving 56 clubs and almost 2700 players'.¹⁴ At the same time, the International Football League Board (popularly known as the Inter-League Board) was founded with the objective of settling disputes and co-ordinating joint initiatives and agreements. The Board's constitution allowed for an equal representation of four officials nominated by each league while the presidency was to alternate between England and Scotland on an annual basis.¹⁵ The notion of joint action enshrined in the Board's rules and bye-laws should not be seen as purely

¹⁰ On the Football League's dependence on Inter-League revenue see chapter 4.

¹¹ Crampsey, *First 100 Years*, p. 245.

¹² Crampsey, *First 100 Years*, p. 29.

¹³ Sutcliffe *et al.*, *Football League*, p. 134.

¹⁴ Quoted in Crampsey, *First 100 Years*, p. 39.

¹⁵ Rules of International Football League Board, *Football League Handbook*, 1899/1900, p. 25.

cosmetic. While disagreements naturally continued to arise, it is evident that on major issues of mutual interest the leagues tended to act collectively. Indeed the Football and Scottish Leagues worked in close consultation during the 1899 transfer dispute with the FA while the Scottish body provided both administrative and financial support to the League in its battle to establish the legality of the retain-and-transfer system which culminated in the Kingaby case of 1912.¹⁶ Likewise, in the creation of the first insurance scheme for British clubs in 1907 and the crucial issue of whether to continue competitive football in 1915, the two senior league organisations (in the latter case with the assistance of the Southern and Irish Leagues) acted in unison.¹⁷

Agreement with the Irish League, always a more detached and antagonistic body in the mind of Football League officials, was slower to arrive. Indeed following the agreements with the Scottish and Southern Leagues (in 1910) over player registrations, increasing numbers of both disengaged and retained players crossed the Irish sea: Belfast, in particular, became known as 'a city of refuge for discontented footballers'.¹⁸ So in 1914, with the intention of closing the Irish door, the League proposed the establishment of an Anglo-Irish Football League Board based on the Scottish model, incorporating the same recognition of club registration and transfer rights.¹⁹ As the spokesman of the Management Committee, Sutcliffe explained that the objective was

to protect their clubs against the migration of players who had been offered reasonable terms by their old clubs. It would prevent players holding a gun to their heads. They may have occasion to suspend players, and the latter, in such circumstance, had no right during the enforced period of idleness to leave this country, play for clubs in Ireland, and then return when their suspension was at an end. Under the agreement this would be stopped... The agreement would put an end to the friction which had existed, and which they hoped would be easily smoothed over, and he hoped their relations would continue to their mutual advantage.²⁰

¹⁶ See Sutcliffe *et al.*, *Football League*, pp. 116, 135; *Athletic News*, 10 April 1916. The Scottish League contributed £150 towards the cost of the Kingaby case.

¹⁷ Sharpe, *40 Years in Football*, p. 158; Sutcliffe *et al.*, *Football League*, pp. 89, 128-29.

¹⁸ *Athletic News*, 16 January 1916.

¹⁹ Rules and Bye-Laws of Anglo-Irish Football League Board, *Football League Handbook*, 1915/16, pp. 59-62. The only variation was that the Anglo-Irish Board consisted of two rather than four representatives from each league.

²⁰ Report of Football League AGM in *Athletic News*, 1 June 1914.

The agreement was eventually sanctioned, but not before those clubs which had recently lost players to Irish rivals attempted to persuade the executive to impose still tighter controls on the Irish poachers. The most prominent of these was Manchester United's suggested two-year limit on the service of registered players with Irish clubs. Clearly the Lancashire club intended to prevent a repetition of the recent departure of Irish forward Mickey Hamill, who had been signed by Belfast Celtic following a dispute over United's failure to guarantee him a benefit in writing.²¹

As we have seen, there was no equivalent Welsh senior national league, though regional leagues comprising clubs from north and south Wales respectively emerged as early as 1890. A Welsh Football League was in fact formed after the First World War and it soon made tentative requests to establish a working relationship with the Football League. Yet neither the minor status of this body nor the limited interaction of its labour force with those of League clubs was considered sufficient to justify the type of formal agreement and consultation machinery arranged with the Scottish and Irish bodies. Indeed there is no evidence that the League Management Committee even debated the Welsh body's 1920 proposals to arrange Inter-League fixtures and allow automatic promotion of its two leading clubs into the newly-founded third division.²²

ii) Controlling the Import and Export of Players

Illegal poaching and the consequent administrative tensions did not cease with the creation of the Inter-League Boards. Neither were the English clubs necessarily the victims: quite the opposite, the minutes of the Football League indicate that its members were found guilty of contravening the Board's bye-laws more often than their Scottish counterparts, though this may have been a reflection of the higher proportion of players moving south. Heavy penalties for illegal approaches were not unknown. At the start of 1911, for instance, Middlesbrough was fined £100 by the

²¹ Hamill stayed in Ireland for six years and when he did return to Manchester it was to join City rather than United. As he was still a registered United player, however, the club received £1,000 for this transfer. Garth Dykes, *The United Alphabet: A Complete Who's Who of Manchester United FC*, Leicester, 1994, p. 170.

²² Alun Evans, 'Football on the Edge: The Relationship between Welsh Football Policy-Making and the British International Championship', Unpublished MA Dissertation, De Montfort University, 1996, pp. 29, 34.

Inter-League Board when it was revealed that the club secretary had travelled to Glasgow, arranged a meeting with, and attempted to sign, a registered Airdrieonians professional. The Management Committee subsequently imparted a further penalty on the club by suspending the secretary for four weeks.²³

But despite the 1914 agreement the major threat to the League's control over its labour force continued to come from Ireland. The modified wartime regulations operative from July 1915 accentuated these problems, as players were partially freed to turn out for a club other than their own. In these cases, however, they were obliged either to join a club close to their residence or work or to seek permission from their contracted club to play elsewhere.²⁴ Difficulties soon arose when Irish clubs, particularly the newly-formed Belfast United, began to sign Football League players without the agreement of their clubs. The League executive believed that one such player, Manchester United's George Anderson, had been induced to move overseas with the promise of accommodation and a job, if not direct payment, from the Belfast club and this at a time when professionalism was outlawed. One former Birmingham professional wrote anonymously to the president of the League, the FA and sections of the press informing them that he had been engaged for a season as a professional in Belfast under a pseudonym and challenging them to uncover his identity.²⁵ In August 1916 the Irish FA finally suspended the Belfast United club when another League player, Grimsby Town's Thomas McKenna, was revealed to have been frequently paid as a professional under the name 'McGuinness': the League reacted immediately to these revelations by banning League professionals indefinitely from playing in Ireland. The administrative conflict escalated when the Irish FA insisted on sanctioning the movement of all Irish players to English clubs and Manchester United itself was accused of signing a registered Linfield player. As an astute editorial in *Athletic News* noted:

Irishmen feel that what is sauce for the goose should be sauce for the gander. Years ago they... had their club ranks raided by some English managers and secretaries. Men had been taken away and trafficked with.

²³ *Athletic News*, 2, 9 January 1911.

²⁴ Sutcliffe *et al.*, *Football League*, pp. 89-90.

²⁵ *Athletic News*, 16, 31 January, 6 March 1916.

If some of them have returned to Ireland there has been a hurly-burly, and much talk of League reprisals and other thoughts. We hear some strong language has been used across the water about the high-handedness of the English League in the past and even their more recent decrees... From what we can gather the English League and their clubs are not too popular in Ireland at the present time.²⁶

While the League's veto on the movement of players to Ireland was soon rescinded, the return to peacetime conditions brought little change in Anglo-Irish relations. First of all, the Football League's decision to postpone the Inter-League match planned for October 1920 due to transport problems within England was publicly criticised by Irish League representatives and described as 'snobbish' by its president, Robert Barr.²⁷ More seriously, however, the two bodies came into bitter conflict later that year over Crystal Palace's signing of R. McCracken from the Belfast-based Distillery club. The Management Committee argued that as Palace had not technically been a member of the Football League when it engaged McCracken the previous June (and that, even then, they were associate rather than full members), the club was not bound by the Anglo-Irish agreement to respect the registration of players. Significantly, the Irish representatives rejected not only the League's argument but also its supporting documentary evidence and sought to refer the matter to the Scottish League for an independent judgement. The League, in turn, objected to this suggestion and informed its clubs that

We can have no further negotiations with an organisation which declines to accept the truth and accuracy of official documents, but challenges them as if they were forgeries and fraudulent.

We regret that though every opportunity was given to the Irish representatives to disclaim, explain, withdraw or intimate their regret for the unwarranted attack made upon you at a meeting of the Irish League clubs, nothing was said to justify or palliate that attack.²⁸

Some members of the Management Committee reportedly felt that the Irish League's obdurate stance was motivated by a desire to end the agreement with the Football

²⁶ *Athletic News*, 14 August, 11 September 1916.

²⁷ Minutes of Football League, 13 September 1920; *Athletic News*, 13 December 1920.

²⁸ Minutes of Football League, 6 December 1920.

League. For one observer, the deadlock and open hostility in the McCracken case signalled that the 'two Leagues have virtually severed their friendly relations'.²⁹

Relations between the two bodies were patched up when the Irish League eventually accepted the position of the Football League's new associate members but the situation was complicated further with political partition in 1922 and the creation of an Irish Free State in the south of the island. The question of the recognition of two separate football associations in Ireland developed into a major and largely unresolved problem for the FA and FIFA throughout the inter-war period and beyond but, for the Football League, partition meant that those clubs incorporated under the aegis of the new Football Association of Ireland (FAI) and the League of Ireland were no longer covered by the Anglo-Irish agreement.³⁰ Though these developments had little immediate impact on the English clubs, it was widely recognised that a potential 'open door' had been created for discontented League players otherwise constrained by the Scottish and Irish settlements. By the 1930s, however, Free State clubs were beginning to sign a number of top League players and in 1931 an *Athletic News* correspondent could proclaim the Irish 'open door' as 'a menace, particularly to English clubs who have paid big sums of money for the transfer of players, and then find they have little control over them at the end of the season'. He went on to advocate that players who refused 'reasonable' terms with their League club and signed for an Irish Free State club should be prohibited from returning to League football.³¹ A less drastic proposal to discourage this particular migration of labour came from the Sheffield United board, which in late 1931 suggested to the Management Committee that players with Free State clubs should have to start at the minimum wage on their return rather than the level reached when they moved away.³² Moreover, the Football League's hostility towards League of Ireland clubs was such that the latter body's proposal to formalise the mutual recognition of registrations in

²⁹ *Athletic News*, 13 December 1920.

³⁰ See Moorhouse, 'One State', pp. 3-7; John Sugden and Alan Bairner, 'Northern Ireland: Sport in a Divided Society' in Lincoln Allison (ed.), *The Politics of Sport*, Manchester, 1986, pp. 108-09.

³¹ *Athletic News*, 8 June 1931.

³² Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 30 December 1931.

1934 was opposed by the Management Committee and, in contrast with the Scottish League, representative fixtures were not arranged until after the Second World War.³³

Even though Football League squads had always contained a mix of British nationalities, the issue of the importation of non-English, particularly Scottish, players increasingly came to the fore during the 1920s. Interestingly, there is little evidence that the long-standing movement of players from the peripheral British countries to England actually quickened significantly in the inter-war years. The overall percentage of non-English players engaged by Football League clubs stayed remarkably consistent at 22.6 per cent in 1910 and 22.5 per cent in 1925 (Tables 8.1 and 8.2). Nevertheless some clubs were almost multi-national in their recruitment campaigns. The Arsenal squad which began the 1925/26 campaign, for instance, included seven Scots, two Irishmen and one Welshman from a total of 27 whose birthplace it has been possible to trace. At the beginning of the 1934/35 season Liverpool went further by fielding a team including just two Englishmen.³⁴ On the other hand, clubs like West Bromwich Albion and Wolverhampton Wanderers rarely had more than one or two non-English players on their books; Sheffield United's 1925 FA Cup winning side, too, was entirely English with the exception of its Irish captain William Gillespie.³⁵ Yet the Scottish presence especially was felt in qualitative rather than quantitative terms. One commentator noted towards the end of 1926 that at least 70 'front rank players' (presumably meaning those with international or representative experience) and many more with emerging reputations had journeyed south since the war. Two years later the Scottish team selected to meet England at Wembley was dominated for the first time by Anglo-Scots, with only three 'home' players selected.³⁶

³³ Sutcliffe *et al.*, *Football League*, p. 142; Crampsey, *First 100 Years*, p. 251.

³⁴ *Athletic News*, 24 August 1925; Young, *Football in Merseyside*, p. 131.

³⁵ Young, *Football in Sheffield*, p. 127. West Bromwich Albion developed a conscious policy not to sign Scottish professionals from as early as the 1900s. A thirty year period without Scots ended in 1937 when centre-forward G. Dudley was bought from Albion Rovers. Golesworthy, *Encyclopaedia of Association Football*, pp. 138-39.

³⁶ H. F. Moorhouse, 'Blue Bonnets over the Border: Scotland and the Migration of Footballers' in John Bale and Joseph Maguire (eds), *The Global Sports Arena: Athletic Talent Migration in an Interdependent World*, London, 1994, p. 81; Paul Joannou, *Wembley Wizards: The Story of a Legend*, Edinburgh, 1990, pp. 20-23.

Table 8.1 Nationality of Football League Players, 1910.

Nationality*	First Division		Second Division		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
English	382	72.5	291	84.8	673	77.4
Scottish	124	23.5	44	12.8	168	19.3
Welsh	11	2.1	4	1.2	15	1.7
Irish	7	1.3	2	0.6	9	1.0
Non-British	3	0.6	2	0.6	5	0.6
Total traced	527		343		870	

* Birthplace

Source: Adapted from Vamplew, *Pay Up*, Table 13.1, p. 205.

Table 8.2 Nationality of Football League Players, 1925.

Nationality*	First Division		Second Division		Third Division		Third Division		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	(S) No.	%	(N) No.	%	No.	%
English	379	74.9	404	76.4	341	75.6	387	83.6	1511	77.5
Scottish	82	16.2	96	18.1	74	16.4	50	10.8	302	15.5
Welsh	25	4.9	22	4.2	25	5.6	18	3.9	90	4.6
Irish**	16	3.2	5	0.9	10	2.2	7	1.5	38	2.0
Non-British	4	0.8	2	0.4	1	0.2	1	0.2	8	0.4
Total Traced	506		529		451		463		1949	

* Birthplace

** Including Irish Free State nationals

Source: *Athletic News*, 3, 10, 17, 24 August 1925.

The mid-1920s, in particular, witnessed a salient trend towards the acquisition of Scottish players, often for large transfer fees. Indeed four of the 'All Tartan' (entirely home-based) Scottish side which met England in 1925 had by 1926 been sold to League clubs for fees of between £4,500-5,000.³⁷ This activity, however, provoked a backlash among some Football League officials and club directors who wished to restrict the number of Scottish imports. In a series of newspaper articles written at the beginning of 1928, Charles Sutcliffe outlined a scheme to impose a £1,000 tax on each transfer from Scottish League to Football League clubs with a reduced tax when players were acquired from Scottish junior clubs. The fund thus created by this taxing system could then be used to aid the finances of struggling third division members. In this way, Sutcliffe argued, the leading clubs would be persuaded 'to turn their attention to the English players on their doorstep, and the English clubs needing help

³⁷ See H. F. Moorhouse, 'Scotland against England: Football and Popular Culture', *International Journal of the History of Sport*, 4, 2, 1987, p. 194 (Table 2).

and encouragement'. In addition, Sutcliffe raised the possibility of limiting the number of non-English nationals registered by Football League clubs, though the idea of prohibiting Scots from competing in the FA Cup competition was firmly rejected.³⁸ In the event no such limitation was imposed but the discussion and contention created by the scheme indicates that, despite its long history, the importation of players from other British countries was not unproblematic.

iii) The League and the British National Associations

The hegemony of the Football League within British football was most clearly demonstrated in its relations with the national associations and the whole debate involving the release of players for international fixtures. At the centre of this debate were the competing claims to the player's services of the club who employed him and the national association to whom he was registered. Both assumed an effective ownership over labour but increasingly it was the League and its clubs which came to dictate which players could be released and even when international fixtures could take place within the football calendar.

The origins of the debate can be located in the 1890s with the growing status of Football League clubs and their ability to attract the best Scottish, Welsh and Irish talent. As we can see from Tables 8.4 and 8.5, Football League clubs contributed a significant proportion of players to the Welsh and smaller numbers to the Irish and Scottish national teams even before 1900 and hence the English body was implicated in the organisation of international matches almost from its foundation.³⁹ From the 1890s the teams selected by these national associations for representative and trial matches were open to the influence of Football League clubs who were often not prepared to release players from important League fixtures on the same day. The Scottish FA responded in 1898 by recommending to the International Board comprising all four British associations that a player should be placed 'directly under the jurisdiction of the Association selecting him' while the FA of Wales claimed 'the

³⁸ See *Topical Times*, 18 February 1928; *Athletic News*, 30 January 1928.

³⁹ English-based players or 'Anglos' were not selected for the Scottish national side until 1896. Moorhouse, 'England against Scotland', p. 193.

right... to call on Welsh players with English clubs'.⁴⁰ Both proposals were checked by the FA, as was a similar joint Welsh-Scottish suggestion the following year which would additionally have enabled the selecting association to cross national boundaries of jurisdiction by punishing those clubs or players from other associations who failed to comply. The four associations instead constructed a less rigid agreement proclaiming that each should 'use their influence with Clubs to ensure to other National Associations the service of Players in International Matches'.⁴¹

While the FA of Wales, and increasingly the money-strapped Irish FA too, made habitual efforts to persuade its more powerful sister organisations to ensure the service of selected players, the League began to take counter steps to make sure that its programme remained free from the disruption of international and representative fixtures. In 1911 the Management Committee was instructed by a resolution of member clubs to arrange Inter-League matches - and to ask the FA to play all International games - on a week-day rather than the customary Saturday. The proposal's sponsor, Tom Harris of Notts County, argued that international calls on players often had 'a very prejudicial effect' on League fixtures while the playing of representative matches on a Saturday also prevented those clubs with town or city rivals from staging such fixtures.⁴² Though Inter-League matches were henceforth often moved to mid-week, the national associations were less willing to allow the Football League to intervene in their schedule and so the antagonism between League clubs and the minor British associations continued to build. In 1921 the Irish FA accentuated the existing tensions by independently inserting a clause in the registration agreement of any Irishman moving across the channel allowing it to appropriate the player's services whenever required. The Management Committee publicly opposed this initiative, though as the registration of players was technically beyond its jurisdiction it was left to the FA and the Scottish FA to force their Irish counterpart to back down.⁴³

⁴⁰ Minutes of International Football Association Board, 20 June 1898; Evans, 'Football on the Edge', p. 37.

⁴¹ Minutes of International Football Association Board, 19 June 1899.

⁴² Report of Football League AGM in *Athletic News*, 5 June 1911.

⁴³ Report of International Football League Board, 12 March 1921; Minutes of International Football Association Board, 10 June 1922.

By the late 1920s, however, the increased number of British internationals playing in the Football League (Tables 8.3 to 8.6) led the FA to bow to concerted pressure from the elite professional clubs. In a letter to the Irish FA written in February 1929, the FA agreed that the next England-Ireland international should be played on a Saturday but intimated that they

may have, in subsequent years, to consider playing the Match on a day other than a Saturday, in view of the many complaints from Clubs of being deprived of the services of players in important matches by reason of the players being chosen to play in Representative Games not only by the FA, but by other National Associations.⁴⁴

The Irish body rebuffed the suggestion on the grounds that 'it was extremely unwise, and against the interests of the game all over the Country [Ireland], to relegate International Matches to a subsidiary position'.⁴⁵ Meanwhile Arsenal, perhaps the most cosmopolitan of the leading League clubs at the time, had issued a circular to each national association advocating that all international fixtures should be played in mid-week. Arsenal could by now count on the backing of some 45 League members as well as the Management Committee, which though proclaiming the loyalty of its clubs to their respective governing bodies was nonetheless determined to see that while Saturday internationals continued, each national association selected players strictly within its own jurisdiction.⁴⁶ At the next annual meeting, then, the Management Committee, backed by a majority of first and second division members, altered its own rules so that 'A Club shall not release any player for International games on a day on which it has a League fixture, except at the call of the National Association of which the Club is a member.' The decision was not unanimous, however, as ten members voted against this interference in the international sphere and a twin proposal to change the FA's rules by prohibiting Saturday and holiday internationals was withdrawn. One opponent, Derby's W. Bendle Moore, described

⁴⁴ FA International Football Association Board Minute Book, 1886-1956, F. J. Wall to Chas. Watson, 22 February 1929.

⁴⁵ FA International Football Association Board Minute Book, 1886-1956, Watson to Wall, 18 April 1929.

⁴⁶ Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 30 October 1929; Moorhouse, 'One State', p. 12; Minutes of Football League, 29 November 1929.

the rule change as ‘a retrograde step’ and appealed to fellow members ‘to consider the matter from the standpoint of the game and not the League position of Clubs’.⁴⁷

Table 8.3 Distribution of Scottish International Caps, 1890-1939

		1890-99		1900-09		1910-19		1920-29		1930-39	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Scottish	League Clubs	203	62.3	246	74.6	107	67.3	256	72.3	329	72.8
Scottish	Non-League Clubs	107	32.9	5	1.5	–	–	–	–	–	–
Football	League Clubs	15	4.6	79	23.9	43	27.0	97	27.4	123	27.2
English	Non-League Clubs	1	0.3	–	–	9	5.7	–	–	–	–
Other		–	–	–	–	–	–	1	0.3	–	–
Total Traced		326		330		159		354		452	

Source: Rothman's Football Yearbook, 1989-90, London, 1989.

Table 8.4 Distribution of Welsh International Caps, 1890-1939

		1890-99		1900-09		1910-19		1920-29		1930-39	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Welsh	Football League Clubs	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	121	36.9	53	15.5
Welsh	Non-League Clubs	151	46.5	96	30.0	27	16.8	9	2.8	8	2.3
English	Football League Clubs	99	30.5	169	52.8	108	67.1	192	58.5	275	80.2
English	Non-League Clubs	68	20.9	52	16.3	26	16.1	6	1.8	–	–
Other		7	2.1	3	0.9	–	–	–	–	7	2.0
Total Traced		325		320		161		328		343	

Source: As Table 8.3.

Table 8.5 Distribution of Irish International Caps, 1890-1939

		1890-99		1900-09		1910-19		1920-29		1930-39	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Irish Clubs		322	98.5	212	65.8	64	39.3	69	21.4	143	42.6
Football	League Clubs	4	1.2	68	21.1	88	54.0	201	62.2	167	49.7
English	Non-League Clubs	1	0.3	29	9.0	1	0.6	1	0.3	1	0.3
Other		–	–	13	4.1	10	6.1	52	16.1	25	7.4
Total Traced		327		322		163		323		336	

Source: As Table 8.3.

⁴⁷ Minutes of Football League, 2 June 1930 (AGM).

Table 8.6 Distribution of Irish Free State International Caps, 1922-39

	1922-29		1930-39	
	No.	%	No.	%
Irish Clubs	48	85.4	165	60.0
Football League Clubs	7	14.6	91	33.1
Other	—	—	19	6.9
Total Traced	48		275	

Source: As Table 8.3.

The impact of the Football League's decision on the selection of Welsh and Irish teams was particularly significant, as they now had to pick from players engaged with clubs in their own less competitive leagues and tournaments. By October 1930 the FA was informed of 'the serious plight in which the FA of Wales has been placed by the recent action of The Football League' and asked to organise a conference with the League and the four national associations so as to reach a compromise 'in a final effort to save the International Tournament'.⁴⁸ The League eventually acceded to this request and a conference was arranged for the beginning of January 1931. The initiative was once again seized by the League representatives, whose proposals were accepted unanimously by the associations as 'a satisfactory solution to the International question'. The agreement consisted of three basic requirements for the release of players. Firstly, Saturdays fixtures were accepted so long as they took place before 14 December each season, with the exception of the customary end of season England-Scotland match. Secondly, the national associations were to apply to the executive 21 days in advance to obtain a League player, and even then his club was at liberty to refuse permission. Finally, a recognised insurance policy was to be taken out on each registered League player by the national association who, in addition, were to pay his weekly wage if the match took place on a Saturday.⁴⁹ While the concession of Saturday internationals generated opposition from some clubs who regarded it as representing a significant disruption of the League programme, the agreement was nevertheless widely recognised as a clear sign of the Football League's dominating influence over British football as a whole.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Minutes of FA International Selection Committee, 13 October 1930.

⁴⁹ Minutes of Football League, 12 January 1931.

⁵⁰ See Minutes of Football League Shareholders' Meeting (First and Second Divisions), 6 March 1931.

In practice, however, the agreement offered no permanent solution, as the discretionary release of players continued to cause friction between the League and the national associations. As we have seen, League clubs had always been entitled to block the release of players, but before 1914 few were prepared to disrupt the primacy of the home internationals for purely selfish club purposes. The 1920s, in contrast, witnessed a significant change in the club directors' perception of the status of internationals *vis-à-vis* the League programme. Indeed, clubs with hopes of winning the championship, gaining promotion or, conversely, those in danger of relegation, regularly pulled their employees out of international squads. Where fixtures clashed, most clubs claimed to allow the player to choose between club and country but there is some evidence that this was not an altogether free choice. It may not be a coincidence, for instance, that West Ham's Welsh international R. W. Richards opted to assist his club rather than his country during its promotion campaign in March 1922 or that in the midst of relegation worries William Gillespie 'preferred to play for [Sheffield] United and not in the International match' for Ireland scheduled for the same day.⁵¹ Alex James was certainly pressurised by the Preston North End directors on a number of occasions to choose club over country: when Scotland's match with Ireland in February 1928 clashed with a vital second division game against Manchester City he reportedly left 'his' decision in the hands of the directors, who predictably elected to keep him.⁵² The Huddersfield Town directors were probably more candid than most when, in response to a request to release their forward W. E. Hayes for a match against Hungary, they informed the FA of Ireland that 'we should do all on our power to help... but it would depend entirely on our [League] position'.⁵³

It is clear, then, that by the late 1920s and early 1930s the League executive and the clubs exercised an effective veto over international team selection, though this was rarely possible for the England team. In March 1930 the Management Committee took the step of explicitly outlawing those agreements issued by certain clubs which

⁵¹ Minutes of West Ham United FC, 12 March 1923; Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 23 February 1921.

⁵² See Harding, *Alex James*, pp. 84-85; *Topical Times*, 3 March 1928.

⁵³ Minutes of Huddersfield Town FC, 6 February 1939. Hayes's release was eventually blocked by the club chairman and League Committee member Amos Brook Hirst.

gave the player 'the right to elect to play in International games'.⁵⁴ Players hoping to establish international careers were thus forced to rely entirely on the benevolence of their board of directors. Those who were ruled out of international duty on a regular basis by their clubs, including James himself at Preston and Irishman Jimmy Dunne at Sheffield United, often attempted to find themselves employers who were more flexible and committed to international football.⁵⁵ In many cases, too, clubs endeavoured to protect their star assets by prohibiting them from touring or playing matches in Ireland or parts of central Europe during periods of political and social unrest.⁵⁶

In view of this general reluctance to release players, it is hardly surprising that the agreement of January 1931 was short-lived. In April 1932 the FA of Wales informed the League and its sister associations of its decision to break from the agreement because 'the position has become untenable through the unjust manner in which the Agreement has been carried out'.⁵⁷ A recent historian of Scottish football has underlined this mood of frustration, noting that while 'Anglo-Scots were usually released... the record of English clubs in so far as Irish and Welsh players were concerned was nothing short of disgraceful'.⁵⁸ The Management Committee, in response, defended the action of its members, arguing in the face of considerable evidence that international releases had in fact been 'liberally given'.⁵⁹ Yet by 1934 the central issue of mid-week matches had surfaced again and in the course of a series of conferences with the four associations at the beginning of that year, the will of the League and its leading clubs finally won through. Significantly, both the FA and the Scottish FA had become convinced that Saturday matches were now an impracticality

⁵⁴ Minutes of Football League, 11 March 1930.

⁵⁵ Harding, *Alex James*, pp. 93-94; Young, *Football in Sheffield*, p. 138; Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 30 August 1933. Both James and Dunne were transferred to Arsenal following disputes over their international availability.

⁵⁶ For example, in 1922 the Sheffield United Committee allowed Gillespie to play for Ireland 'if he expressed a strong desire to do so' but minuted its opinion that 'in its present disturbed state, he ought not to go'. In the event, Gillespie played. The Huddersfield directors were less flexible in 1939 when in reply to an application for Hayes to tour Hungary and Germany with the FA of Ireland, they replied that 'owing to the present state of unrest we are not prepared to let any of our players go into Germany'. Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 22 March 1922; Minutes of Huddersfield Town FC, 17 April 1939.

⁵⁷ Minutes of FA International Selection Committee, 22 April 1932.

⁵⁸ Crampsey, *First 100 Years*, p. 97.

⁵⁹ Sutcliffe *et al.*, *Football League*, p. 139.

and the latter body issued its own scheme for all internationals, except England-Scotland, to be played during the week. In a summary report to the FA Council, vice-president William Pickford lucidly identified the League's principal objections to the existing arrangements:

Their contention is that their commitments are too serious to permit them to supply, particularly Wales and Ireland, with the bulk of their players for Saturday International Matches. Both these Associations make heavy demands on their nationals playing in England. If all International games were played on Saturdays the League Clubs would, if compelled to release players, provide on average 40 players for Scotland, Wales and Ireland in addition to 33 and 6 reserves to travel, for England. In practice, until a few years ago, the clubs, asked by the other Associations for players, were reasonable, but held their right to refuse. They are the employers of the players and insist on that right. A Club cannot be compelled to release a player for another Association, and what one Club may do a combination of Clubs may do.⁶⁰

These sentiments were echoed by the Management Committee's own statement to the FA:

Players are sought and signed on by clubs for the purpose of their own Competitions, and it must be readily appreciated that the players fit for International duty are the most attractive players on the clubs' books and, in these days of keen competition, cannot be replaced except after considerable negotiation and expense, if at all.⁶¹

Though the FA of Wales were now prepared to accept mid-week matches, the Irish delegates refused and, with the League clubs intent on collectively withholding their players for all internationals during the coming season, the negotiations appeared to have reached a deadlock. But at the 1934 annual meeting McKenna and the executive persuaded member clubs to compromise by allowing both the smaller associations one home Saturday fixture each season. To compensate for this additional loss of players, all future Inter-League games were to be moved to week-days from the weekend.⁶²

⁶⁰ FA Minute Books, International Matches Memorandum: Summary of position by W. Pickford of matters discussed at 9 January and 16 March 1934 Conferences

⁶¹ Sutcliffe *et al.*, *Football League*, p. 140.

⁶² Sutcliffe *et al.*, *Football League*, p. 141.

The foregoing discussion clearly demonstrates that the hegemony of the Football League over the professional game in Scotland, Wales and Ireland was established and then consolidated over the first four decades of this century. In the first place, these nations provided significant and increasing percentages of the League's labour force and, as a result of the establishment of mutual agreements with the Scottish and Irish Leagues for the registration of players with administrative boards to settle disputes, the control over footballers had been extended throughout the United Kingdom. Furthermore, once large numbers of non-English players had become employees of Football League clubs it was possible for Preston to dictate the timetabling of international matches, the selection of international teams and, indirectly, to control the finances of the Scottish, Welsh and Irish national associations. This power remained latent until the 1920s when the in-flux of greater numbers of top quality footballers from these countries led the League executive and its leading clubs to adopt a number of policies which were broadly successful in asserting the primacy of the League competition over international fixtures. By 1939 there is little doubt that the decisions made at the headquarters of the national associations in Glasgow, Cardiff and Belfast were increasingly subject to confirmation and agreement from Preston.

2. The League and Overseas Football

Studies of the interaction and relationship between British football and the game in the rest of the world in the early part of the twentieth century have revealed some fundamental contradictions. The isolation, insularity and sheer arrogance of the football authorities are generally taken as read: in his recent history of world football, Bill Murray has said of this period that 'much of the progress on the continent was passing unnoticed' in Britain⁶³; the action of the British governing bodies in distancing themselves from FIFA for much of this time appeared to symbolise this position. However, on a less formal level British clubs, players and coaches were instrumental in the development of the administrative and playing side of football in continental Europe, the Americas and parts of the British Empire. The inter-war period witnessed numerous British club and representative sides touring abroad each

⁶³ Murray, *Football*, p. 93.

year and the cementing of institutional and personal relations which in some cases proved to have a remarkably longevity. That influential figures in British football kept more than an eye on events beyond the Channel is also clear from the memoirs of, among others, the most successful manager of the inter-war era, Herbert Chapman, the journalist and former League amateur Ivan Sharpe, as well as the private archives of another leading journalist, James Catton.⁶⁴ The close links with the British game established by 'the presiding geniuses of European football in the 1930s'⁶⁵, the Austrian manager and administrator Hugo Meisl and the Italian manager Vittorio Pozzo, also serve as a partial corrective to the idea that having given the game to the world Britain then bolted the door and ventured out only reluctantly.⁶⁶

The Football League's stance reflected these contradictions perfectly. At first glance the League appears to have been willingly detached from all aspects of non-British football. Not only was it an essentially selfish body, concerned with the interests of its members and little else; it also exhibited a parochial and inward-looking sense of superiority which rendered even the inclusion of clubs from the south of England, and hence its transformation into a 'national' league, a long-drawn out and highly contested process (see chapter 2). With football in London marginalised for so long, it is hardly surprising that the game in Vienna, Budapest, Paris and New York was largely overlooked. Moreover, unlike the FA, the League felt no moral duty to popularise the game outside its own territory. FA tours to the continent and further afield were generally regarded as a distraction by the Management Committee and the clubs. When the governing body appealed to members of the League to nominate players for a six month round trip to Australasia planned for 1925 it met with an almost uniformly negative response.⁶⁷ The Management Committee, equally dismissive of the venture, was eventually persuaded to lean on its clubs and in October 1924 it issued a circular recommending that the FA's appeal should be

⁶⁴ See Herbert Chapman, *Herbert Chapman on Football*, London, 1934; Sharpe, *40 Years in Football*, especially chapters 9, 16 and 24; Catton Folders and Archives, held at Arsenal FC, Highbury Stadium, London.

⁶⁵ Murray, *Football*, p. 93.

⁶⁶ On Meisl, see the later account by his journalist brother Willi Meisl, *Soccer Revolution*, London, 1956.

⁶⁷ See Minutes of Aston Villa FC, 2 January 1924; Minutes of West Ham United FC, 9 January 1924.

reconsidered, together with an uncharacteristic statement of support for the 'missionary' trip:

The Committee feel that the debt of gratitude and obligation we owe to Australia cannot be properly recognised except by sending out a team of International strength which will be a credit to this country, prove attractive to the Australian people, and be effective in encouraging and popularising the game.⁶⁸

Such sentiments are notable precisely because they were so rare: indeed, in the administrative activity as well as the newspaper columns of Bentley, Sutcliffe, McKenna and Cuff, little interest was shown towards overseas developments, except where these impacted directly on the League. The only obvious exception to this rule was John Lewis, who until his death in 1926 was a well-known international referee and propagandist for football in Europe and the Empire. After retiring as a League referee in 1905, Lewis was recalled to officiate at the 1908 London Olympics and also took control of the controversial 1920 Olympic Final at Antwerp in which the Czech side left the field following a sending-off and he awarded the game to Belgium.⁶⁹ Additionally, in his later years, Lewis undertook overseas trips as a travelling official with FA representative sides to South Africa and Australia (the aforementioned 1925 trip). As Sutcliffe himself commented, Lewis threw everything into his work abroad, becoming 'a missionary for football' and 'devoting time and money to a ceaseless propaganda in our Colonies where football was in its infancy'.⁷⁰

There is little indication that the League as a body or its officials individually were directly involved in the FA's stormy relationship with the world governing body, FIFA. Certainly the issues on which the two sides parted company in 1920 and 1928 - contacts with the defeated nations in the First World War and the question of 'broken time' payments and the definition of amateurism - might be considered of little

⁶⁸ Minutes of Football League, 3 October 1924.

⁶⁹ Miller, *Blackburn Worthies*, pp. 228-29; Jackman, *Blackburn Rovers*, p. 145.

⁷⁰ Sutcliffe and Hargreaves, *History of the Lancashire FA*, p. 158.

immediate concern to the League.⁷¹ But the broader fear that by the 1920s FIFA was increasingly intent on threatening the autonomy of the British associations, which in 1927 developed into a debate over the pedantics of which body could call itself 'the final authority of the game' on a global scale, undoubtedly had implications for the status and power of the League. The recurring suggestion that the four British associations should have just a single vote at FIFA meetings had embittered relations since the FA was admitted to FIFA in 1905 but gained a resurgence in the mid-1920s. At the same time, British authority was more dramatically threatened by those continental administrators and journalists who began to advocate the modification of Britain's majority vote on the International Board, a body with complete control over changes in the laws of the game. In turn, this raised the spectre of the Football League becoming subject to overseas interference and control. The possible repercussions for the elite professional game, as *Athletic News* noted, were momentous: 'We might have to accept fantastic alteration[s] of the laws of the game emanating from Thibet or Timbuctoo (sic.)- a development which our traditions and heavy financial commitments could not risk.'⁷²

Though hardly devotees of continental football or advocates of closer ties with overseas football bodies, League Committeemen did come into contact with continental administrators at conferences and on international committees. In his position as a vice-president of the FA, McKenna became a member of the International Board just in time to be involved in the formal exclusion of the two FIFA representatives in June 1920⁷³; Sutcliffe, meanwhile, was one of five FA representatives who voted to withdraw once more from FIFA at a conference of the United Kingdom associations in February 1928. One month prior to this conference, Sutcliffe had unambiguously informed *Topical Times* readers of his attitude towards the world governing body:

I don't care a brass farthing about the improvement of the game in France, Belgium, Austria or Germany. The FIFA does not appeal to me. An

⁷¹ On the rise of FIFA and its evolving relationship with the British governing bodies see G. Furrer, P. C. Godoy and S. Blatter, *FIFA 1904-1984*, Zurich, 1984; Alan Tomlinson, 'Going Global: The FIFA Story' in Tomlinson and Whannel (eds), *Off The Ball*, pp. 87-93.

⁷² *Athletic News*, 30 January 1928.

⁷³ See Minutes of International Football Association Board, 14 June 1920.

organisation where such football associations as those of Uruguay and Paraguay, Brazil and Egypt, Bohemia and Pan Russia, are co-equal with England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland seems to me to be a case of magnifying the midgets. If Central Europe or any other district want to govern football let them confine their powers and authority to themselves, and we can look after our own affairs.⁷⁴

Although it is impossible to identify Sutcliffe's precise contribution to the subsequent decision, the recorded minutes of the conference and the FA's formal letter of withdrawal clearly echo his earlier sentiments, if in a more diplomatic tone. While hoping to maintain 'friendly relations' with FIFA, the associations indicated their wish 'to conduct their affairs in the way their long experience has shown desirable', and informed the FIFA secretary that the 'comparatively recent formation' of most of the affiliated FIFA members rendered them ill-equipped to deal with the knotty issue of defining amateurism. Without the British, it was assumed that FIFA 'cannot have the knowledge which only experience can bring'.⁷⁵ Sutcliffe's high-minded disdain for FIFA was underlined later that year when in response to the rumoured prohibition of British tours on the continent he noted that 'In parting from the Federation we lose nothing, in slamming the door in our face they have lost wisdom, guidance and help.'⁷⁶

As far as the growth of leagues in continental Europe and the Americas was concerned, the Football League provided no material or technical assistance. Yet in almost every case the League was used as a model of structure and policy. Few league competitions deviated much from what Lanfranchi has called the 'British model of championships', with promotion and relegation and movement up or down based on sporting merit. Those that did, particularly the American league, were influenced by an established tradition of sporting competition based on the principle of a 'fixed elite'.⁷⁷ The French League was one which consciously 'borrowed' from the Football League in its formative stage, from regulations such as the maximum wage to the acquisition of many of its players (see below). But while the League may have

⁷⁴ *Topical Times*, 14 January 1928.

⁷⁵ FA Minute Books, Report of the Conference of Representatives of the Associations of the United Kingdom, 17 February 1928.

⁷⁶ *Topical Times*, 12 May 1928.

⁷⁷ Lanfranchi, 'Exporting Football', pp. 34, 44.

provided a structure, the substance and style of the emerging continental competitions both nationally and internationally were filled in with almost no English assistance. The central European nations of Austria, Hungary and Czechoslovakia, in particular, developed their own competitions like the Mitropa Cup and schedules of international fixtures; even autonomous styles of play.⁷⁸ Thus the conventional picture of English and League football in this period is one of almost complete introversion and exclusion: while continental nations played each other, disseminated ideas and exchanged talent, the English 'put themselves... outside a vast, unprecedented network of exchanges'.⁷⁹

i) Overseas Contacts and Foreign Tours

To dwell on the institutional isolation and apparent hostility of the Football League towards overseas football, however, would be to ignore the multifarious activity which existed below the surface at an informal club and individual level. The close season tour was probably the earliest and most important aspect of this. The pioneers here were the southern amateur clubs who began arranging individual exhibition matches and even full-blown tours of continental Europe towards the late 1890s. League clubs were slower to take up the challenge, not due to worries about the cost but because prospective tours coincided with the signing-on process in late April and May and many players were unwilling to travel abroad after a long domestic season. Some clubs like Sheffield United were simply unable to raise a touring party as many of their players were either engaged in first class cricket or in other business pursuits during the summer.⁸⁰ Nevertheless, by the late 1900s a number of League clubs were making annual or bi-annual visits to the continent. Austria-Hungary appears to have been the most popular destination in these formative years: in the decade before the First World War, Everton, Manchester United, Sunderland, Barnsley, Blackburn Rovers, Oldham Athletic, Tottenham Hotspur and Burnley all played there.⁸¹ Others travelled further afield. Nottingham Forest followed the initiative of Southern

⁷⁸ Lanfranchi, 'Exporting Football', pp. 33-36.

⁷⁹ Pierre Lanfranchi, 'Bologna: The Team that Shook the World', *IJHS*, 8, 3, 1991, p. 338.

⁸⁰ For these reasons plus a disinclination to play Sunday matches, the Sheffield United Committee declined numerous offers to tour continental Europe and South America before 1914. See Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 1903-12 *passim*; *Athletic News*, 8 March 1909.

⁸¹ Meisl, *Soccer Revolution*, pp. 57-60.

Leaguers Southampton and the amateur Corinthians when it played a series of matches in Uruguay and Argentina in 1905. Everton and Tottenham Hotspur made the same journey in 1909, playing games against local clubs, Uruguayan and Argentinean League teams and even against each other in two exhibition matches.⁸²

Tours of this kind received neither official promotion nor condemnation from the League executive. While the FA would often act as a go-between, receiving offers from foreign associations and clubs which were then passed on to selected League members, the Management Committee remained uninvolved. In fact its first intervention came in 1912 when it responded to Newcastle United's action in paying players £1 per day expenses while on tour by ruling that, in future tours, players 'must not be allowed to make a profit'. In addition, the Committee was to be notified of the terms, conditions and arrangements for any proposed tour and furnished with a thorough financial statement within two weeks of the clubs' return.⁸³ But it was the FA rather than the League which could officially sanction or veto overseas tours, even if the latter sometimes intervened to modify certain details and continued to set maximum limits on the tour expenses given to players.

By the 1920s overseas tours were increasing in frequency as well as in terms of their significance in the sporting calendars of the leading League clubs. Club minute books reveal that offers to tour the continent were received almost every winter from overseas clubs or associations and tended to be accepted more often than before the war. In 1922 Arsenal and Everton visited Sweden and Denmark respectively while Newcastle United played in both these countries; Burnley and Liverpool, meanwhile, travelled to Italy and Notts County, Durham City and Hartlepools United undertook tours in Spain. Two years later the Management Committee provisionally sanctioned continental tours by eight first division, three second division and three southern third division clubs.⁸⁴ West Ham United was one of the most regular tourists, travelling to the Basque region of Spain in 1921, Austria and Czechoslovakia in 1923, Germany, Switzerland and France in 1924, Holland in 1925 and Spain again a year later. The

⁸² Mason, *Passion of the People?*, pp. 17-18, 19; Keates, *History of the Everton Football Club*, p. 132.

⁸³ Minutes of Football League, 9 August 1912.

⁸⁴ Minutes of Football League, 28 April 1922, 11 April, 12 May 1924.

primary reasons behind this increased continental activity were clearly financial. If efficiently arranged, a close season tour could often turn a disappointing season's deficit into a profit. Everton's 1909 tour to South America had reportedly made a £300 profit which itself was dwarfed three years later by the profit of over 20,000 dollars received on a similar trip by the Southern League club Swindon Town.⁸⁵ European tours generally grossed smaller but not insignificant sums. West Ham received £900 for the five matches on its 1923 post-FA Cup Final trip to central Europe while Aston Villa was guaranteed £2,000 for a six-match tour of Scandinavia in 1926.⁸⁶ It must be added, however, that not every League club believed in the benefits of touring. The Sheffield United Committee continued to block tour proposals throughout the 1920s and much of the 1930s, even recording in its 1924 minutes an official resolution not 'to entertain the idea of any Continental Tour'. The Committee finally agreed to its first overseas venture when a tour party was sent to Sweden in 1938.⁸⁷

In the process of arranging tours and individual matches, some clubs built up a network of institutional contacts on the continent. Often this led to return visits abroad or even return matches in England, as when West Ham entertained the Hakoah club of Vienna in September 1923 following the first meeting of the two on the Hammers' summer tour; or when Nice, managed by the former Notts County player Charlie Bell, played at Molineux the season after Wolverhampton Wanderers' 1933 French tour.⁸⁸ Individuals like Hugo Meisl and his journalist brother Willi, who was based in London for part of the 1930s, were important in facilitating such links and organising matches, in their case with Austrian and Hungarian clubs; the League referee R. G. Rudd performed a similar function with the Scandinavian clubs.⁸⁹ But this did not prevent the clubs themselves forming close and sometimes long-standing relationships. There are indeed some indications that the idea of regular fixtures with

⁸⁵ Mason, *Passion of the People?*, p. 23.

⁸⁶ Minutes of West Ham United, 24 April 1923; Minutes of Aston Villa FC, 16 March 1926.

⁸⁷ See Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 12 November 1924; 9 February 1938.

⁸⁸ Minutes of West Ham United FC, 9 July, 13, 20 August 1923; Matthews, *The Wolves*, p. 34; Dennis Turner and Alex White, *Football Managers*, Derby, 1993, p. 86.

⁸⁹ References to the role of Rudd in facilitating tours and matches with Scandinavian club sides can be found throughout the minute books of Aston Villa, West Ham United, Sheffield United and the other clubs.

overseas opposition was considered even before the First World War: Sheffield United, for instance, declined FC Bruges' suggestion to inaugurate an annual Easter match between the two sides in 1912.⁹⁰ The best known series of matches, however, was undoubtedly Arsenal's annual Armistice day fixture against Racing Club de Paris which began in the mid-1920s and lasted through to the 1950s. These matches were considered to be extremely successful on both sides of the Channel, with crowds regularly topping the 50,000 mark.⁹¹ Furthermore, by the 1930s the visits of club sides were no longer exclusively in one direction as more continental teams were invited to play on Football League grounds. The London clubs appear to have taken the lead here, especially Arsenal and Tottenham Hotspur, whose grounds also began to be used for England international matches at this time. But others soon followed, and not only those clubs from the highest division. Second division West Ham, for one, staged matches against AIK Stockholm, Austria FC and a Hungarian XI during the first half of the 1935/36 season. The Swedish club had visited Upton Park the previous season; an event which was recorded in the club's minutes as 'a most happy occasion'. Representatives of the FA, the London FA, Swedish and English diplomats and even Prince Carl of Sweden were entertained at the match and an after-match dinner which for the club 'marked a further step in Diplomatic and Sporting relations' and 'would ever remain a delightful memory at Upton Park'.⁹²

It would be wrong, however, to assume that matches between Football League clubs and continental opposition were always regarded as mutually beneficial, unproblematic, celebratory occasions. There were in fact more voices calling for clubs to withdraw from the continent than to extend and strengthen relations. The perceived benefits of overseas excursions, which were never fully appreciated at executive level, were coming to be increasingly undermined by the late 1920s, primarily as a result of the damage done to the League's prestige by regular defeats. The large and easy victories recorded by many English teams before 1914 became more rare between the wars as superior coaching methods and administrative nous enabled continental sides to close the quality gap. Sunderland's 2-1 defeat by Vienna

⁹⁰ Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 22 November 1911.

⁹¹ See Allison, *Allison Calling*, p. 142; Ousti Jordan, *Football European*, Paris, 1947, p. 88.

⁹² Minutes of West Ham United FC, 26 November 1934.

AC in 1909 after finishing third in the first division was the first Football League failure on the continent but was regarded as little more than an aberration: the superiority of the masters over the pupils was still taken for granted.⁹³ After the war things changed slowly but significantly: defeats became more common at club level, even if the ramifications of the 'Versailles mentality' in international football and the withdrawals from FIFA meant that England's national side was spared possible defeat by the stronger central European nations during the 1920s, particularly Germany and Austria.⁹⁴ Under these circumstances, tour matches gained an added resonance, offering as they did the only chance for aspiring continentals to pit their skills against the English masters.

But Football League clubs treated these encounters rather differently, often sending weakened sides which were accused by the continental and British press alike of not treating tour matches as proper competitive fixtures. After a series of defeats in the summer of 1927, *Athletic News* mounted a campaign aimed at informing League clubs and the football authorities of 'how British prestige was suffering by the defeats of tired and holiday-making touring teams'.⁹⁵ A year later the exit of the British associations from FIFA resulted in a retaliatory attempt by the latter to prohibit British tours of the continent. Sutcliffe's reaction to this probably reflected that of many League and club officials:

I have always taken a very definite stand against Continental tours. They serve no good purpose to our football or footballers. The only description is Continental picnics, where football is very secondary. At times the games are played on grounds, and under conditions, with so-called referees, which reduce the game from that of contest to one of farce. Our players have got to face a keen effort on the part of their opponents determined to win, and players are subject to serious risk which may have an effect on the playing ability of some players in the next season... The close season should be a period of rest and recovery, and if the International Federation ban the visits of our clubs to meet Continental clubs, I shall be delighted.⁹⁶

⁹³ Murray, *Football*, p. 66.

⁹⁴ Lanfranchi, 'Exporting football', p. 34.

⁹⁵ *Athletic News*, 6 June 1927. On Burnley's 4-2 defeat in Nuremburg in 1927 see Theo Riegler, *Als Staulfauth noch im Tor Stand... Ein Buch vom deutschen Fussball*, Munich, 1953, p. 101.

⁹⁶ *Topical Times*, 5 May 1928.

FIFA did subsequently issue a ban but this was quickly rescinded due to pressure from clubs in England and abroad who had already entered into tour contracts. That summer League prestige was further dented when the FA Cup holders Blackburn Rovers recorded five defeats in six games while touring Austria-Hungary and Czechoslovakia. At that years' annual meeting McKenna 'expressed the hope that the League Clubs touring the Continent would maintain the prestige of the League' but, in concert with Sutcliffe, added that if clubs continued to be beaten match after match 'it would be better not to go'.⁹⁷ Certainly the League hierarchy was reluctant for its clubs to assume an ambassadorial role, especially if this adversely affected the smooth running and status of its own competition.

In 1929 the debate intensified further as League clubs suffered ever more embarrassing tour defeats. Huddersfield Town lost four of its five matches in Austria-Hungary and Czechoslovakia which, upset by poor refereeing standards convinced Joseph Barlow, the director in charge of the party, not to 'go on tour again against professional Continental teams';⁹⁸ Cup winners Bolton Wanderers, meanwhile, was trounced 4-0 by a Catalan Select XI at the opening of Barcelona's new 65,000 all-seater stadium in front of the Spanish King.⁹⁹ But the most bitter criticism was reserved for Newcastle United, who were beaten 8-1 by a 'second-rate Austrian team' called Pozsony and also lost matches in Bratislava and Prague.¹⁰⁰ After the clubs' 2-0 defeat by the Vienna AC club, the local *Neues Wiener Journal* claimed that '10,000 spectators were deceived of their money' and declared that: 'We need no more games with English teams. That is the nett result of the match with Newcastle and of most displays given by English teams in Vienna since the war.' The Prague correspondent of the *Berliner Zeitung am Mittag* broadened the criticism by suggesting that

The English professional teams have so far only brought disappointments, as practically all their matches in Vienna, Budapest, Prague, Leipsic (sic.) etc., have suffered from the indifference shown by these guests in carrying out their fixtures, with the result that they have been defeated almost

⁹⁷ Minutes of Football League, 4 June 1928; *Athletic News*, 11 June 1928.

⁹⁸ *Athletic News*, 3 June 1929.

⁹⁹ J. Garcia Castell, *Historia del Futbol Catala*, Barcelona, 1968, p. 191; Dean Hayes, *Bolton Wanderers: An A-Z*, Preston, 1994, p. 52.

¹⁰⁰ F. W. Carter and W. Capel-Kirby, *The Mighty Kick: The History, Romance and Humour of Football*, London, 1933, p. 64.

everywhere. For the organisers, at all events, an experience and unprofitable pastime, and for the Englishmen a well-paid pleasure trip!¹⁰¹

The Hungarian FA even made a formal complaint to the FA about the performances of Newcastle and an FA commission (including McKenna in its ranks) judged that because of the 'indifferent displays given by the Newcastle United players during the tour... the Hungarian FA were justified in endeavouring to cancel the contract'.¹⁰² Beyond this, however, nothing was done. One writer to *Athletic News* felt that the Foreign Office should refuse passports to those teams which were unable to uphold national prestige abroad, while Derby County's W. Bendle Moore informed his fellow League secretaries and managers that 'no one - whether it was the FA or the smallest club in the country - had the right to send a team abroad unless it was a competent team accompanied by plenty of reserves'.¹⁰³

Meanwhile, the League itself took no action, despite the secretary of the FA of Wales' prediction that the Management Committee would be moved to prohibit further continental tours; neither was there any attempt to regulate the type of matches played, as the Scottish League did when it ruled that clubs touring Europe could play district teams but not national representative teams, while those visiting the colonies or dominions could meet both.¹⁰⁴ In 1931 Arsenal proposed that the Football League's prestige abroad could best be protected by paying bonuses to players on the regular League scale 'if in the opinion of the Management Committee the games were of sufficient importance'.¹⁰⁵ Huddersfield Town, Chelsea and Port Vale, among others, shared Arsenal's views but the Committee opposed them and the proposal was defeated by 18 votes to 16. Ever mindful of the League's reputation, McKenna felt 'it would be said on the Continent that we could not win matches without paying. The Arsenal had won their matches, and all players should be loyal to their country and their clubs'.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰¹ Both extracts are quoted in *Athletic News*, 3 June 1929.

¹⁰² Minutes of FA Emergency Committee, 8 October-9 December 1929.

¹⁰³ *Athletic News*, 20 May 1929; Report of Football League Secretaries' and Managers' Association AGM in *Athletic News*, 10 June 1929.

¹⁰⁴ *Athletic News*, 15 June 1929; Crampsey, *First 100 Years*, p. 100.

¹⁰⁵ Minutes of Football League, 1 June 1931 (AGM).

¹⁰⁶ Report of Football League AGM in *Athletic News*, 8 June 1931.

Little changed in the course of the 1930s. 1932 witnessed a further series of poor overseas performances, with Newcastle again criticised during a visit to France, along with the reigning first division champions Everton, who won only two of their four tour games. Moreover, the scale of press criticism at home both deepened and widened: British (and particularly Football League) clubs were now accused not only of damaging the prestige of the sport but of the nation as a whole. 'The people who let British football down are letting Britain down. There is no question about that.'¹⁰⁷ In spite of this public onslaught, and the occasional promise to remedy the problem, the League and the FA still refused to intervene. But this apparent inertia reveals a more important point about the purpose of overseas tours and matches in the eyes of League officials. Unlike the leading clubs in central Europe, Football League clubs did not *need* to tour extensively for financial or other reasons. They were not, except in the view of a rather nationalistic, metropolitan press, seen as ambassadors of the nation in the way that the clubs of Vienna, Budapest and Prague often were.¹⁰⁸ Everything considered, overseas competition was always regarded simply as a temporary or seasonal distraction from the real business of life - domestic competition - and thus whatever happened abroad really did not matter much. In this context it is hardly surprising that Chelsea's defeat by Bologna in the final of the 1937 Paris Exhibition Competition caused hardly a stir at home, while in Fascist Italy it became the occasion for nationalistic outpourings and a symbol of national prestige.¹⁰⁹

ii) Foreign Leagues and Alien Players

Defeats while playing abroad, though damaging to the prestige and reputation of the League and its clubs, could easily be rationalised or simply swept under the carpet. However, when overseas progress impinged upon the League's domestic authority, the response was quite different. The growth of clubs and then leagues abroad did not necessarily represent a danger to the Football League but this changed in the inter-war period when clubs from two specific nations - the United States and France - endeavoured to recruit League players. There had been precursors of this type of

¹⁰⁷ Carter and Capel-Kirby, *Mighty Kick*, pp. 66-67.

¹⁰⁸ Lanfranchi, 'Exporting Football', pp. 35-36. The same can be said of France and Spain, where League matches were not so prestigious or well attended as friendly contests with international opposition.

¹⁰⁹ Lanfranchi, 'Bologna', pp. 336-37.

activity. As early as 1894 five players broke their League contracts and sailed to the United States where they were to be employed by clubs in the baseball-financed American League of Professional Clubs on comparatively generous terms of £10 down and £4-5 per week. But the newly-formed league immediately faced immigration problems with the US government over its foreign imports and was forced to disband within just six weeks: the players 'discovered that in the New World disillusionment was the consequence of insubstantial promises: they quickly came back'.¹¹⁰

A more important forerunner to the export of League players, however, was the export of ex-players as coaches. Though there is no data available on the number of ex-League players employed in coaching posts overseas at any one time, the fragmentary evidence seems to support Mason's view that they 'were to be found everywhere, from Spain to Hungary, to Italy and Uruguay' and often in considerable numbers.¹¹¹ The high-point of the British coach abroad was probably immediately after the First World War and the 1920s, although some, including the most successful British coach of the period, Jimmy Hogan, began before 1914. Hogan coached national and club sides in Holland, Austria, Hungary, Germany, France and Switzerland between 1918 and 1934 (see chapter 6); Manchester United's former full-back Herbert Burgess enjoyed a similarly lengthy coaching career in Hungary, Spain, Italy, Austria, Denmark and Sweden from 1920-32 and even applied for positions in Canadian football.¹¹² In 1927 *Athletic News* could report that Germany's two most powerful clubs were both coached by former League players: ex-England internationals Fred Spikesley with Nuremberg and Will Townley at Furth.¹¹³ The Dutch FA employed a coterie of ex-League coaches in the early 1930s, including Bob Glendenning (Barnsley/Bolton Wanderers), Gus Smith (Sunderland) and Harry Marsden (Sheffield Wednesday). Yet by 1933 Carter and Capel-Kirby could detect a move away from

¹¹⁰ Young, *Football in Sheffield*, p. 73. See also David Waldstein and Stephen Wagg, 'Unamerican Activity? Football in US and Canadian Society' in Stephen Wagg (ed.), *Giving the Game Away: Football, Politics and Culture on Five Continents*, Leicester, 1995, p. 75.

¹¹¹ Mason, 'Some Englishmen and Scotsmen Abroad', p. 74. Carter and Capel-Kirby suggested in 1933 that 'Hundreds of ex-players from England and beyond the Tweed have found lucrative and pleasant employment abroad [as coaches]'. *Mighty Kick*, p. 140.

¹¹² Mason, 'Some Englishmen and Scotsmen Abroad', p. 74; Dykes, *United Alphabet*, pp. 60-61; Catton Folders, B-C, Herbert Burgess to James Catton, undated, p. 206.

¹¹³ *Athletic News*, 6 June 1927.

British coaches on the continent, with only two out of some 500 in Germany and William Garbutt as the lone British representative amongst 45 Hungarians in Italy.¹¹⁴

The migration of former players - or those approaching retirement - as coaches caused little disruption in League circles. As the demand for coaching services within the League was limited, most club directors and League officials were willing to release players to the continent or any other destination. The Management Committee even allowed clubs to free players under contract for summer coaching engagements in preparation for their post-playing career, as when Everton's England international Sam Chedgzoy was permitted to take up such an appointment in Canada.¹¹⁵ But it was when offers arrived for contracted footballers to *play* abroad that the League really stirred. The initial threat came from the United States when its American Soccer League was formed in 1921. Unrestricted by any registration agreement, American clubs were able to sign retained League players free of charge and without reference to their English clubs. By late 1923 the activities of American scouts had generated a minor panic amongst League clubs, even though it was the Scottish League which was particularly targeted. Some observers regarded this as a real menace to the ability of League clubs to hold on to their players and demand transfer fees.¹¹⁶ Others, like Sutcliffe, believed the American 'menace' would be short-lived and that players would come to realise 'that to leave England with its definite benefits for America with its promises is taking a leap in the dark'.¹¹⁷

Sutcliffe's prognosis proved to be fairly accurate as the movement of players across the Atlantic failed to develop into more than a trickle. Even so, the capture of some prominent internationals such as Manchester City's Mickey Hamill in 1924 and Arsenal's Scottish goalkeeper William Harper in 1928 were considered serious enough for the League executive to enact certain deterrent measures. At the end of 1926 it was ruled that players leaving a club for America or the continent could not be re-registered with the Football League 'until the Management Committee has had ample opportunity to investigate the circumstances under which the Player left and the

¹¹⁴ Carter and Capel-Kirby, *Mighty Kick*, pp. 132, 140.

¹¹⁵ Minutes of Football League, 22 October 1923.

¹¹⁶ *Topical Times*, 10 May 1924.

¹¹⁷ *Sports Pictures*, 31 May 1924.

reasons for and conditions attendant on his return'.¹¹⁸ A few months later the Committee suspended a former Bradford (Park Avenue) player engaged in America's New Bedford City Football League for alleged inducements to contracted League players and issued the warning that it would 'entirely prohibit all Tours to the United States so long as any American Club improperly attempts to interfere with any of our League clubs'.¹¹⁹ Yet despite widespread fears of players being permanently suspended or banned for life, the League did in fact leave the door open and players did not generally stay away for long. Harper came back to Arsenal within two seasons before moving on to Plymouth Argyle, while after leaving Derby County for America, the Irish centre-back Mick O'Brien soon returned to find a new position at Watford.¹²⁰ The American challenge really subsided when it was revealed in August 1928 that Everton's record goal-scorer 'Dixie' Dean had been offered, and refused, a move to the New York Giants for a reported wage of £25 per week. One correspondent concluded that 'the American menace has been grossly exaggerated by the scare-mongers' and that Dean's rejection could 'be taken as a symbol of defeat for the plans of our friends on the other side of the Atlantic'.¹²¹

While the threatened exodus of players to America failed to materialise, the French 'menace' of the 1930s proved to have more substance. In 1932 a professional league was created in France which from its beginnings rested on a policy of importing foreign footballers.¹²² British players were immediately seen as attractive acquisitions, partly because of their footballing abilities but mainly because no transfer fees were necessary due to the British exclusion from FIFA. In the close season of 1932 the spectre of French scouts signing up League professionals *en masse* dominated the sporting press. At first French clubs appeared to be targeting elite players like Chelsea's Scottish international pairing of Hughie Gallacher and Tommy Law, as well as Arsenal's David Jack, with offers of positions as player-coaches. With a maximum wage of only 2,000 francs a month (equivalent to just over £5 per week), however, it was impossible for French clubs to lure the best talent. The offers

¹¹⁸ Minutes of Football League, 13 December 1926.

¹¹⁹ Minutes of Football League, 7 March 1927.

¹²⁰ Carter and Capel-Kirby, *Mighty Kick*, pp. 119-20.

¹²¹ *Topical Times*, 11 August 1928.

for Gallacher, Law and Jack were thus rejected: a director of Sporting Club Nîmes revealed to one newspaper that he was looking for second or third division players as 'the big men are quite beyond our means'.¹²³ Even so, the League executive issued a resolution in April intended to frighten off both potential migrants and poachers:

Players are warned that on taking Continental engagements without the consent of the Clubs retaining or offering to retain them, the Management Committee will ask the League to prohibit the registration of such players on seeking to return to a League Club in this country.

Continental and all Clubs outside the jurisdiction of the Football Associations of England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales interfering with players connected with Clubs of the Football League will be regarded as having committed an unfriendly act toward the League and all friendly relations will cease.¹²⁴

In short, McKenna told reporters, players going to France 'would cease to have the right to play again in this country'.¹²⁵ This threat had only a limited effect because in May two Chelsea internationals - Andy Wilson and Alex Cheyne - travelled to France to join Nîmes. By September they had been followed by a stream, if hardly a flood, of British professionals, many technically still attached to League clubs, although it must be added that others were unretained and were therefore entirely free to play wherever they wished.¹²⁶

Table 8.7 British Players in the French Football League, 1932-39

Season	1932/33	1933/34	1934/35	1935/36	1936/37	1937/38	1938/39
First Division	43	26	15	15	10	9	5
(Clubs)	(20)	(14)	(16)	(16)	(16)	(16)	(16)
Second Division	—	21	25	26	17*	14**	9
(Clubs)	(-)	(23)	(16)	(18)	(28)	(34)	(22)
Total	43	47	40	41	27	23	14

* Including Third Division.

** Including the Complementary Group.

Source: Calculated from data compiled by Pierre Lanfranchi, De Montfort University.

¹²² See Pierre Lanfranchi, 'The Migration of Footballers: the Case of France, 1932-1982' in Bale and Maguire (eds), *Global Sports Arena*, p. 63.

¹²³ *Daily Mail*, 14 April 1932.

¹²⁴ Minutes of Football League, 22 April 1932.

¹²⁵ *Daily Mail*, 14 April 1932.

¹²⁶ Carter and Capel-Kirby, *Mighty Kick*, pp. 116-19.

Table 8.8 British Players in the French First Division as a percentage of all players, 1932-39

Season	No. British Players	As % Non-French Players	As % All Players
1932/33	43	40.7	11.9
1933/34	26	27.6	9.6
1934/35	15	14.3	4.5
1935/36	15	15.2	4.9
1936/37	10	9.4	2.9
1937/38	9	8.8	2.8
1938/39	5	6.9	1.5

Source: Calculated from data compiled by Pierre Lanfranchi, De Montfort University; Wahl and Lanfranchi, *Les Footballeurs Professionnels*, p. 79.

In the first two seasons of the French first division the British were the dominant non-French national grouping, although it is difficult to calculate the precise proportion who arrived from Football League, as opposed to Scottish or lower league, clubs. Many players were signed for trial periods or on month-to-month contracts and some, like Bill Fraser at Marseilles, even returned home in time for the start of the English season.¹²⁷ In an article for *Topical Times*, Fraser indicated that his return to England was motivated by 'the danger of falling out of touch with football in this country' and, more specifically, by the FA and League warnings that players who deserted their clubs would never be allowed back. In reality, however, as with the American exiles, most were able to return to League football without too much trouble.¹²⁸ Though they first required League and FA sanction, both Wilson and Cheyne had re-signed for League clubs within two seasons, the latter actually returning to Chelsea. Even when complications arose, the football authorities did not bolt the door shut. In one telling case from 1937, G. E. Gibson returned to England in violation of his contract with Racing Club de Roubaix and, though the FA instructed him to go back to France to complete his agreement, Roubaix refused to remove the suspension or reinstate him. In these circumstances, the FA chose to protect the interests of the player by refusing the French FA's demand for a transfer fee and allowing Gibson to register as a professional with any English club he wished.¹²⁹ Indeed, notwithstanding the

¹²⁷ See Minutes of AFPTU, 22 August 1932 (AGM). T. L. Davis broke his one-and-a-half month contract at FC Metz after just two weeks in May 1935 and signed a contract with Oldham Athletic for the 1935/36 season. He was eventually suspended for three months in a joint decision by the FA and the French FA. Minutes of FA Emergency Committee, 28 May-19 August 1935.

¹²⁸ *Topical Times*, 13 August 1932.

¹²⁹ Minutes of FA Consultative Committee, 12 January-15 February 1937; Minutes of AFPTU, 22 March 1937.

resolution of 1932, there is no evidence that the League or the FA ever refused to re-register a professional who had played in France.

By the mid-1930s the French threat to League clubs was no longer considered particularly serious as migration slowed and some of the best known captures returned home. After 1934 the majority of British players were engaged in the second rather than the first tier of French football and the British presence in the top division dwindled from 11.9 to just 1.5 per cent over the seven year period from the creation of the League to the outbreak of war (Tables 8.7 and 8.8). There were both sporting and economic reasons behind this downturn. Even some of the most talented former League players found themselves unable to adapt to the very different culture of French football and society. The best example is provided by the sojourn of Peter O'Dowd, the only fully capped England international to play in France, who failed to secure a regular place in the Valenciennes side during the 1935/36 season and returned to League football with Torquay United in early 1937. Experiences of this kind clearly diminished the reputation of British players and managers, a factor which was compounded by the economic crisis in central Europe which allowed French clubs to acquire the very best Hungarian and Austrian players at relatively inexpensive prices.¹³⁰

While the Football League struggled in the inter-war years to prevent its employees leaving Britain, it also colluded with the FA, the Players' Union and the Ministry of Labour to keep foreign players out. With the exception of a handful of colonial-born players, non-British footballers had never featured in League sides. In 1910 Grimsby Town were playing a half-back called Max Seeburg, an assimilated German who had previously turned out for Tottenham, Chelsea and Burnley and later joined Reading. A Dane and an Italian also played in League football for one season before the First World War.¹³¹ Liverpool, meanwhile, employed a number of South Africans from the mid-1920s and by the early 1930s had six on their books, but in general terms even

¹³⁰ See Pierre Lanfranchi and Matthew Taylor, 'British Footballers in France, 1932-39: A Failure?', unpublished paper presented at the Conference of the British Society of Sports Historians, 1997; Lanfranchi, 'Migration of Footballers', p. 69. Also see Tony Mason, 'The Bogota Affair' in Bale and Maguire (eds), *Global Sports Arena*, pp. 39-48.

¹³¹ *Athletic News*, 14 August 1911; Golesworthy, *Encyclopaedia of Association Football*, p. 65.

recruits from the empire and commonwealth were rare. Certainly there was nothing approaching the 'scramble for overseas talent' which took place in cricket's Lancashire League between the wars, even taking into account the fact that football did not have the same 'imperial connection'.¹³² Indeed we can see from Tables 8.1 and 8.2 that there were only five players born outside Britain in the two League divisions in 1911 and just eight in four divisions by 1925. This paucity of non-British talent may have reflected wider prejudices towards foreigners and overseas football but it was also undoubtedly the result of restrictive measures passed at central government level. Up until 1905 there was almost no legislative control over immigration into Britain but over the subsequent fifteen years a series of parliamentary acts placed considerable restriction on entry. The 1919 Aliens Act and the subsequent Orders in Council of 1920 and 1925, in particular, provided strict guidelines for the employment of aliens and left entry in the hands of immigration officials.¹³³ In this context, any attempt to import players from abroad faced significant obstacles and, in the event, few clubs tried. One or two, however, did. The best example is Arsenal's attempt in 1930 to sign the Austrian goalkeeper Rudy Hiden. Negotiations between Herbert Chapman and Meisl, Hiden's club manager, had been successful; a fee was agreed and the player was even guaranteed a supplementary job in London as a chef. Yet on his arrival Hiden was denied entry by immigration officials. He was subsequently signed by Racing Club de Paris, with whom he actually played at Highbury against Arsenal in the annual armistice match. At the same time the Belgian centre-forward Raymond Braine faced similar obstructions when he signed for Clapton Orient and was forced to return to Belgium before his League registration could be completed.¹³⁴ Both players had been refused entry according to the established Ministry of Labour criteria that their presence would have restricted the employment opportunities of British workers.

¹³² Young, *Football in Merseyside*, pp. 130-31; Jeffrey Hill, 'Cricket and the Imperial Connection: Overseas Players in Lancashire in the Inter-war Years' in Bale and Maguire (eds), *Global Sports Arena*, p. 52.

¹³³ Colin Holmes, *John Bull's Island: Immigration and British Society, 1871-1971*, London, 1988, pp. 113-14.

¹³⁴ Carter and Capel-Kirby, *Mighty Kick*, p. 121.

The Hiden and Braine incidents caused considerable discussion within football circles and prompted the football authorities into taking action of their own. Not surprisingly, British players were unambiguous in their opposition to the idea of foreign imports. The Players' Union informed the Ministry of Labour of 'its disapproval of allowing Alien Professional Footballers into the country' and trusted that the Ministry would 'continue to follow its present principles'.¹³⁵ Even one of Hiden's prospective team-mates, Eddie Hapgood, later admitted that the Ministry of Labour's action was perhaps a good thing: 'There's plenty enough good players in this country to go round without importing them from abroad.'¹³⁶ Meanwhile, the FA, backed by League representatives, considered a number of measures aimed at restricting overseas professionals. In October 1930 Wreford-Brown, a former amateur international and representative of Oxford University, proposed to the FA Council that a two-year residential qualification should be imposed on non-British players wishing to compete in the FA Cup. His primary object was to nip in the bud a possible wave of continental imports: 'with talent becoming so highly developed on the Continent no one knows what may happen in the future'.¹³⁷ But the FA actually went one step further in 1931 by extending Wreford-Brown's residential qualification to 'all clubs and all competitions, including the League', with the stated objective of preventing 'the importation of any players into England from abroad'.¹³⁸ Thus the regulations of the FA when combined with restrictive government legislation created for the Football League an almost impenetrable barrier which protected it from contact with continental playing talent during the 1930s.

3. Conclusion: An Insular League?

For the Football League and its predominantly English membership, international football consisted of two distinct and fundamentally contrasting relationships. Close contacts between the FA and its sister associations in Scotland, Ireland and Wales preceded the creation of the League, while non-English players and administrators

¹³⁵ Minutes of AFPTU, 25 August 1930.

¹³⁶ Eddie Hapgood, *Football Ambassador*, London, 1944, p. 70.

¹³⁷ Catton Folders, B, Newspaper clipping on Wreford Brown's proposal to ban continental players, 9 October 1931, p. 174.

¹³⁸ *Athletic News*, 8 June 1931.

were instrumental in the foundation and early progress of its leading clubs. Thus the League emerged in an environment where national footballing distinctions were fluid and boundaries largely ignored. From the beginnings, the Football League's perspective was British rather than strictly English and its horizons stretched beyond the territory of its membership and towards Glasgow, Belfast and Cardiff. The process of expansion, in which the League developed into the premier football competition not only in England, but in Britain also, reinforced the basic inequalities in the relationship between the British football organisations. By the inter-war period Football League clubs were employing the most talented players throughout the British Isles and, with their greater financial clout, were able to dictate the terms on which players would be released to play for their countries of birth. The League's hegemony over British football was widely acknowledged. W. E. Maley, a Celtic director, admitted that these players 'belong to English clubs, and Scotland has not the slightest claim over them. Self preservation is what matters now first and last in English professional club football'.¹³⁹

While self-preservation encouraged Preston to effectively control the British game, it led to the opposite impulse in relation to overseas football. Historians have rightly emphasised the 'administrative isolationism' of British football, especially in the inter-war period, which was undoubtedly associated with a wider perspective of 'splendid isolation' in the British economy, society and culture.¹⁴⁰ Moreover, the Football League, in concert with the FA, was successfully able (in the main) to seal Britain off hermetically from the interchange of playing talent between different nations and leagues which was a feature of football in continental Europe and the Americas. Notwithstanding the importance of informal links between League clubs and their continental counterparts, which have been largely overlooked in previous studies, the League remained insulated from overseas developments and only glanced beyond British shores when its administrative or sporting authority became threatened. In contrast to its view of British 'international' football, the League

¹³⁹ *Athletic News*, 9 June 1930.

¹⁴⁰ Walvin, *People's Game*, p. 143; Raphael Samuel, 'Introduction: exciting to be English' in Raphael Samuel (ed.), *Patriotism: The Making and Unmaking of British National Identity, Volume 1: History and Politics*, pp. xxii-xxviii.

considered the game overseas as a fundamentally alien affair which it neither wanted nor needed to involve itself in.

CHAPTER NINE

THE LEAGUE, THE PUBLIC AND THE PROMOTION OF FOOTBALL

We may not like it but football from the point of view of management is largely a business on a considerable scale... In these days you have to fetch them (the crowds) in by making an irresistible appeal and, in this respect at least, we do not differ greatly from other entertainment promoters.

Herbert Chapman, *Herbert Chapman on Football*, London, 1934, p. 125.

While much of the early historiography on the commercialisation of sport and leisure has focused on the mid and late Victorian period and even before, recent studies have confirmed that the first half of the twentieth century represented an equally crucial phase of this commercial revolution.¹ In football, certainly, the development of a fully regulated labour market, bureaucratic and administrative structures, and large-scale ground improvements were all prominent features of this period. Ancillary services such as the press and gambling also underwent a significant transformation, while the rise of the football pools and radio broadcasting in the late 1920s and 1930s contributed both to a widening of the potential football 'public' and increased opportunities for additional club and League income. The contemporary consensus was that elite professional football was 'big business' in the early twentieth century and had become an industry in its own right by 1939. Paradoxically, however, the role of the Football League and its member clubs in this area has tended to be downplayed: inertia if not obstinate conservatism has become the orthodox interpretation of the League's response to the commercialisation of the game. According to this view, rising attendances and widespread financial prosperity necessitated against thorough commercial exploitation: the League did not expand the commercial side of its operations simply because there was no pressure to do so. More than this, the assumption is that the general increase in gates was a direct by-product of rising working-class prosperity and consumer spending.² Periods of

¹ Jones, 'Economic Aspects', pp. 286-99; *Sport, politics and the working-class*. On the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries see J. H. Plumb, *The Commercialisation of Leisure in Eighteenth-Century England*, Reading, 1974; R. W. Malcolmson, *Popular Recreations in English Society, 1700-1850*, 1973; Hugh Cunningham, *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution*, London, 1980. On the late nineteenth-century see Vamplew, *Pay Up*, 1988. For a recent restatement of eighteenth and nineteenth-century commercialisation, Neil Wigglesworth, *The Evolution of English Sport*, London, 1996.

² The best example of this viewpoint is Wagg, *The Football World*, pp. 30, 37.

declining attendances, competition from other sports and entertainments, and the subsequent response of League clubs, are rarely brought into the equation.

This chapter will attempt to present a more balanced picture of the Football League's relationship with both its immediate spectating public and the broader general public, with whom it connected indirectly through the media, the pools and other non-sporting activities. The main chronological focus will be the period after the First World War. In particular, we will seek to determine how far opposition to some forms of commercial and popular penetration was modified by other attempts to widen the potential audience and effectively 'sell' the game. This, too, is tied to the whole issue of the League's perception of the product it 'manufactured' and the ostensibly contradictory arenas of sport and entertainment. Was the League competition seen by officials, directors and players as a form of entertainment comparable to the theatre, music-hall or the cinema? If so, to what extent did football clubs adopt techniques prevalent in other parts of the entertainment industry in order to stimulate demand and increase audiences? In essence, we will attempt to evaluate the degree to which the game's undisputed popularity at the outbreak of war in 1939 occurred because, or in spite, of the activity of the League executive and its clubs.

1. Attendances, Gate Receipts and the Popularity of League Football

Notwithstanding the significant fluctuations and uneven development of the British economy as a whole, particularly in the inter-war years, the commercial growth of the Football League in this period was undoubtedly significant. The best illustration of this can be found in the rise of attendances and gate receipts. Data on both has proved to be notoriously patchy and unreliable for most of this period and historians have thus generally been forced to rely on press estimates or other impressionistic published material. Rather surprisingly the clubs' own statistics and those kept centrally by the League from 1925 have been largely neglected, though it must be acknowledged that these too are problematic.³ Yet taking these limitations into

³ It should not be assumed that clubs were always honest about the attendances and gate receipts received. They may well have kept separate records for League inspection as many undoubtedly did for other financial matters.

account, it is still possible to outline the salient trends and to establish whether the period witnessed a basic expansion or contraction in spectator support. Mason has identified that the average attendance at first division matches in 1908/09 was just below 16,000 while Fishwick found that this had increased by approximately 1,000 by the 1911/12 season; Tischler's calculated average of over 23,000 for 1913/14 appears too high to fit with the gradual seasonal increase before the First World War.⁴ Between the wars average first division attendances rose again, from approximately 22,000 in the immediate post-war season to over 25,000 in 1927/28 and then 30,000 by 1937/38.⁵ The contrast appears to be marked: in 1908/09 six million people watched first division matches while the figure was nearly 14 million by 1938/39.⁶

The problem with statistics of this kind is that they suggest an uninterrupted rise in popularity by ignoring examples of contraction and focusing solely on the top division. The picture is not in fact of a uniform upward curve in attendances and gate receipts but of uneven progress with cycles of rising and falling popular support. Attendances seem to have dropped in the mid-1920s and early 1930s in response to changes in the wider economic environment and there is evidence that gates dropped again towards the end of the 1930s after reaching a peak during the middle of the decade. Some clubs were certainly affected by the economic slumps of 1922 and the early 1930s more than others. The third division northern section suffered particularly in both periods. Inglis has calculated that most clubs in this section yielded between £3-4,000 in the 1921/22 season although the receipts of five - Halifax Town, Rochdale, Nelson, Stalybridge Celtic and Durham City - dropped below this level.⁷ A decade later Accrington Stanley was surviving on home receipts of about £140 per match while Darlington's average gate was down by about 1,000 on the previous season to just 3,300. Of course, the financial position of clubs during the depression was also regionally differentiated: the *Daily Mail* could report in April 1932 that Middlesbrough, Blackburn Rovers, Bolton Wanderers, Burnley, Preston North End

⁴ Mason, *Association Football*, pp. 141-43, 168-69; Fishwick, *English Football*, p. 48; Tischler, *Footballers and Businessmen*, p. 84.

⁵ Fishwick, *English Football*, p. 49. Fishwick's figures may overestimate attendance levels as they are based on the beginning of each season (September and October) when the largest gates were often recorded.

⁶ Jones, 'Economic Aspects', p. 289.

⁷ Inglis, *League Football*, pp. 126-27. Also see his analysis in Appendix 8, pp. 430-31.

and Oldham Athletic had all 'suffered grievously' during the preceding season in terms of falling attendances and gate receipts while the support for London clubs had held out and in some cases increased.⁸ And as Table 9.1 suggests, the financial advances of the leading clubs were continually offset by the financial struggles of the lower division members as the economic gap between the top and the bottom grew. Thus while Arsenal's annual gate receipts were a little under three times those of third division Reading in 1925/26, they had leapt to nearly six times as much by 1935/36.⁹

Table 9.1 Average Attendances and Gate Receipts of Selected Football League Clubs, 1925/26-1935/36

Club	1925/26			1930/31			1935/36		
	Div. (Pos.) (£)*	Att.	Gate	Div. (Pos.) (£)*	Att.	Gate	Div. (Pos.) (£)*	Att.	Gate
Arsenal	1 (2)	31,432	1,609	1 (1)	36,650	1,892	1 (6)	41,960	2,393
Aston Villa	1 (6)	25,879	1,237	1 (2)	30,781	1,541	1 (21)	40,864	1,966
Huddersfield Town	1 (1)	19,567	863	1 (5)	13,929	581	1 (3)	15,097	653
Reading	3 S (1)	12,765	588	2 (21)	9,318	391	3 S (3)	9,594	399

* Net receipts

Source: Calculated from data in Football League Attendance Books.

The available evidence indicates that the popularity of the Football League measured by attendance figures and gate receipts did not in fact rise steadily or uniformly after the First World War but fluctuated both on an individual club and collective League level. This is not to deny the claim that more people watched Football League matches - and paid more to do so - in 1939 than in 1919 (notwithstanding the expansion from 44 to 88 clubs) but to qualify the conventional historical assumption that spectators simply 'turned up in droves'¹⁰ at every ground throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Historians themselves are guilty here of being too easily dazzled by the big games and the record attendances of the top clubs to see the wider and more complicated picture.¹¹ More than this, it is important to relativise the popularity of League football by considering it alongside other sports and forms of entertainment. Jones has emphasised the broader demand conditions which facilitated increases in spending on entertainment and recreation: expenditure on admissions to theatres, cinemas and sporting events rose from £56.2 million in 1920 to £64.9 million in 1938.¹² These conditions benefited the major team sports like cricket and rugby

⁸ *Daily Mail*, 7 April 1932.

⁹ Calculated from Football League Attendance Books.

¹⁰ Wagg, *Football World*, p. 37.

¹¹ See, for example, Mason, 'Football'; Jones, *Sport, politics and the working class*, pp. 45-46.

¹² Jones, 'Economic Aspects', p. 287.

league, which, however, never matched the attendance levels of football; and horse racing and greyhound racing, which sometimes did. Yet the public support for all these sports was dwarfed towards the end of our period by the growth of cinema; 'indisputably', in Jeffrey Richards' words, 'the most popular form of entertainment in Britain in the 1930s'.¹³ While the Football League was able to attract some 31.43 million spectators paying £1.57 million in entry fees to all its matches during the course of the 1937/38 season, British cinema audiences hit 987 million with £41.5 million in gross receipts.¹⁴ It is essential to keep in mind, then, that the League did not develop in a commercial vacuum but as one part of a broader process of recreational expansion from the nineteenth century and that it could never simply count on a broad base of support in view of the potential and real competition from other sporting activities and entertainments.

2. Selling the Game: The League and Popular Entertainment

The precise connection between top level professional football and entertainment was as elusive for contemporaries as it has proved to be for historians. There has been a tendency amongst academics to perceive 'sport' and 'entertainment' as fundamentally separate spheres of activity although both are normally located within the broader categories of 'leisure' or 'recreation'. Notwithstanding the crucial importance of the spectating public for the League's financial security, contemporary observers generally tried to distance the game from comparisons with the entertainment industry. This was certainly the case before 1914 when the notions of 'business football' and the importance of the spectators were habitually lambasted in the southern-based press, and often elsewhere, as contravening the basic tenets of sporting practice. *Athletic News* stood largely alone in 1901 when it objected to the decision of the governing body to cancel a week of fixtures because of the Queen's death by referring to the practice of theatres and music-halls:

Surely there is a strong analogy between professional football and theatricals. Both are entertainments, and, in order to provide those of

¹³ Jeffrey Richards, *The Age of the Dream Palace: Cinema and Society in Britain, 1930-1939*, London, 1984, p. 11.

¹⁴ Jones, 'Economic Aspects', pp. 288-89; Richards, *Dream Palace*, p. 11.

good class, competent performers have to be engaged so that they can give their patrons a good show for their money. And with a large proportion of the theatres, music-halls and other houses of entertainment in the country open, does it not seem absurd to practically taboo football.¹⁵

Moreover, commercial motives and objectives were undoubtedly less thoroughly developed among Football League clubs than in comparable entertainment businesses. Peter Bailey, for example, has described the Victorian music hall as 'a prototype modern entertainment industry, not just because its capital investment allowed economies of scale which secured it a mass paying audience, but because of the thorough-going commercialisation which accompanied all facets of its operation'.¹⁶ By comparison, the complex amalgam of club directors' motives and the restrictions on shareholders' dividends seem to suggest a different type of commercial orientation in League football. Vamplew and other historians have established that many sports clubs and investors did not fit neatly into the category of profit-maximisers, a category more ideally suited to music-hall and cinema entrepreneurs. In the Football League, certainly, there is ample evidence of profits being sacrificed for improved playing squads and ground facilities.¹⁷

There is little doubt that the place of entertainment in football was less easy to identify and define than at the cinema, for instance. For most club directors and supporters it is likely that winning matches took precedence over entertainment, though it must not be assumed that these two aims were mutually exclusive: a talented team or the acquisition of a renowned player would hopefully ensure both. Entertainment, in short, was regarded not as the essence but a by-product of sporting competition. This attitude was largely shared by the players. The Sunderland, Derby County and England international forward Raich Carter commented in his autobiography that

An actor, for instance, sets out with the full knowledge that he has to hold and entertain a public audience. With the exception of one or two who

¹⁵ *Athletic News*, 28 January 1901. The most prominent supporters of the FA and critics of the League's opposition in this matter were the *Daily Mail*, *Daily Express* and *Truth*. See *Athletic News*, 4 February 1901.

¹⁶ Peter Bailey, *Leisure and Class in Victorian Britain: Rational Recreation and the Contest for Control, 1830-1885*, London, 1987, p. 157.

¹⁷ Vamplew, *Pay Up*, chapters 8-11; Fishwick, *English Football*, pp. 39-44. On music-hall entrepreneurs see Peter Bailey, 'Custom, Capital and Culture', pp. 180-208. For the cinema, see Richards, *Dream Palace*, chapter 2; Chanan, 'Emergence of an Industry', pp. 39-58.

deliberately play to the gallery, a footballer is never consciously entertaining his spectators. His business is to win the match with the help of his ten colleagues.¹⁸

Yet by the inter-war period it was becoming increasingly difficult to deny that at least one aspect of the Football League's purpose was to provide popular entertainment. At a basic level this was recognised by professional football's inclusion along with other sports in the government's entertainment tax regulations from 1916. The tax was applied to all tickets for entertainment events and even those clubs struggling to remain viable in the lower reaches of the League ladder were not exempt. The League's acceptance of the measure, albeit initially during the abnormal conditions of war, could be interpreted as a partial acceptance of its common interests with the entertainment industry. Indeed as the tax began to eat into the income of clubs after the war, alliances were made beyond the sporting world: hence the public support many clubs gave to the Provincial Entertainments Proprietors' and Managers' Association in its attempt to force the Chancellor to repeal the tax in 1930.¹⁹

More than this, however, there is evidence that the 1920s and 1930s witnessed a subtle change in League attitudes towards the concept of entertaining the spectating public. This can be seen in three main areas: alterations in the laws of the game; changes in ground facilities and the accommodation of spectators; and attempts to improve the football match as a spectacle. First of all, it is important to recognise that the laws of the game throughout this period were under constant re-evaluation and underwent almost annual modification. The body responsible for rule changes was the International Board consisting of representatives of each of the British Football Associations and, intermittently from 1913, of FIFA. Thus alterations were not made specifically according to the wishes and concerns of professional football in general, or the Football League in particular, and it is indeed difficult to gauge the precise degree of influence which League representatives or club directors were able to wield. Certainly, there appears to have been relatively little concern in League circles about the need to produce attractive football at the beginning of the period, even though

¹⁸ Carter, *Footballer's Progress*, pp. 50-51.

¹⁹ See Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 26 February 1930. Also see Minutes of FA Finance and General Purposes Committee, 22 August 1938.

contemporary observations bear witness to the increasingly defensive style of play adopted by many sides. The pervasive use of the so-called 'one-back game' in which one full back would drop into a deep defensive position so as to limit long forward passing generated particular press criticism. Yet in answer to those critics who regarded the tactic as unsportsmanlike and unattractive, League representatives often emphasised a different set of priorities. Addressing the issue in December 1901, for example, John Lewis argued that while 'there was an element of the spectacular' in football and 'those who pay have a right to be considered', the foremost objective for every club was nevertheless to win and if the one-back game achieved this then there could be no objection to it.²⁰ It is indeed noteworthy, and perhaps a little surprising, that before 1914 League clubs were rarely at the forefront of movements to introduce laws aimed at making goals easier to score or improving the visual attraction by minimising stoppages in the game. For example, the League had no direct input into the rule changes of 1903 when the International Board permitted a goal to be scored direct from a free kick awarded for a penalty offence or, conversely, in 1914 when an attempt to reduce stoppages caused by injuries was blocked.²¹ On the second occasion, W. A. Wilkinson of Manchester City opposed the proposal because he believed spectators would be more likely to object to seeing 'a man in agony left to pick himself up while play continued' than to the frequent halts in play caused by real and imaginary injuries.²² The spectator was therefore given some consideration but this did not necessarily equate with a concern for his (or her) entertainment.

The changing attitudes towards the offside law over the period reflected the way in which the entertainment of spectators shifted from a marginal to a central consideration within League circles. Attempts by the Scottish FA to alter the law so that two rather than three opponents were required to be between the forward and the goal when a pass was made generated strong opposition for more than a decade after an initial proposal had failed in 1913. On that occasion the presumed advantage of increased goal-scoring failed to convince League directors, who felt that the alteration would give forwards an unfair advantage and penalise good back play; the following

²⁰ *Athletic News*, 16 December 1901.

²¹ Mason, 'Football', p. 155; Report of FA AGM in *Athletic News*, 1 June 1903.

²² Report of FA AGM in *Athletic News*, 1 June 1914.

season vice-president John Lewis (in his capacity as representative of Blackburn Rovers) seconded another motion to oppose the Scottish proposals.²³ The development of defensive tactics including the offside trap, however, led to a change of opinion, fuelled by the low goal-scoring in League matches in the early 1920s (Appendix 13). In 1923 the FA Council attempted to amend the offside law by limiting the area in which a player could be caught offside to forty yards from each goal line on the grounds that 'it would largely reduce the number of stoppages and permit of the game being carried on more consecutively and with more satisfaction to the spectators'.²⁴ The proposal narrowly failed at this and the following annual meeting but by 1925 the support of a vast majority of League officials and club directors had bolstered the movement for change. For many the problem had now reached a crisis point. Charles Buchan claimed that matches were becoming 'a procession of free-kicks' and Sutcliffe agreed that players and referees were 'sick to death of the eternal whistle'.²⁵ But, significantly, for the first time the key interest group used to justify the change in the law from three to two defenders were the spectators. The League had arranged for the proposed new law to be tried as an experiment at a number of representative and practice matches with the positive result that the ball was in play longer than under the old rule and that play around the goal area was made more exciting.²⁶ During the debate at the FA annual meeting Sutcliffe emphasised the importance of not discrediting the game 'in the eyes of the public' by continuing with the present unsatisfactory offside law. Fred Rinder employed a similar argument when he told delegates that

Football had attained its world-wide popularity by its attractiveness, its quick movements, its thrills and its minimum of stoppages. These must be maintained to command the support of the public, by which the game existed. The best player could not outmanoeuvre such tactics as he had seen employed in a cup-tie 'to spoil what is the most interesting feature of the game - a pretty passing run up the field.'²⁷

²³ Reports of FA AGMs in *Athletic News*, 2 June 1913, 1 June 1924.

²⁴ Report of FA AGM in *Athletic News*, 4 June 1923.

²⁵ Buchan, *Lifetime in Football*, p. 30.

²⁶ Minutes of Football League, 12 January, 3 April 1925; Wolverhampton Wanderers FC Programme, 29 August 1925.

²⁷ Report of FA AGM in *Athletic News*, 15 June 1925.

There was still considerable opposition to the change amongst mainly amateur clubs and associations but this was insufficient to prevent its acceptance and certainly, as Appendix 13 shows, it had the desired effect of improving goal ratios, even if some observers believed that as a consequence speed had been substituted for skill.

Unlike in rugby league, however, there was no systematic effort to make the game more attractive for spectators. The alterations made in rugby league's rules between 1898 and 1907 - including the abandonment of line-outs, the introduction of the play-the-ball rule and the reduction of the number of players on each side from 15 to 13 - were motivated partly by the rival attraction of football with its 'potentially flowing simplicities'.²⁸ Football, as the premier winter sport, had no such model, so the changes which were made in the rules were intended to refine the game's fundamental attractions by reducing unnecessary stoppages and other factors which disrupted or slowed the pace of the game. Even then it must be remembered that the Football League was not able to change the game's laws unilaterally for its own purposes in the way that the Northern Rugby Football League was: the FA's broad authority meant that law changes had to be appropriate and acceptable to the amateur and lower levels of the administration and not just moulded for the purpose of League clubs with big crowds; and the machinery of the International Board also made it necessary to gain Scottish, Irish and Welsh approval for any proposed change. Thus even on occasions when its influence appeared to be paramount, as in 1925, the League's control over the rules of the game was really never more than partial.

As well as attempting to improve the product on offer, there were some signs of Football League clubs trying to improve the manner in which it was consumed. This took the form, firstly, of better ground facilities and spectating conditions. The first major wave of ground building and development took place in the 1889-1910 period, with clubs either moving into established recreational and sporting venues or transforming sites of open land. Vast sums were spent in this direction: Everton invested some £41,000 on two large stands between 1907 and 1909 and a further £12,000 improving the terracing and other features of the ground; Middlesbrough spent £10-11,000 on its new Ayresome Park ground in 1903 and Birmingham laid out

²⁸ Moorhouse, *A People's Game*, p. 65. Also see Vamplew, *Pay Up*, p. 151.

a similar sum building St. Andrews three years later.²⁹ Such developments often allowed clubs not only to cater for larger numbers of spectators but to provide an improved view of the match in more palatial surroundings. Manchester United's new Old Trafford ground which was opened in 1909 at the cost of £36,000 was described by one writer as 'a wonder to behold': as well as features designed for players and directors, the ground provided cover for 12,000 in its grandstand and a further 24,000 standing, out of a total capacity of 80,000.³⁰ Additionally, the club boasted that the numerous entrances and exits allowed spectators to move easily to the particular portion of the ground desired and that, with no a cycling or running track, 'the sightseers are brought as near as possible to the playing portion'; the rectangular shape of the ground with curved corners was also designed 'so that everybody will be able to see'.³¹ Not every club, of course, had the financial resources to undertake such developments and those that did often had to convert themselves into limited liability companies or issue debenture schemes to do so. While the Oldham Athletic directors, for example, recognised the importance of 'a well-equipped ground' to the club's future success, they struggled to find the capital needed to finance a new stand and were forced to hurriedly construct one costing just £1,750 following the club's unexpected admission to the League in 1907.³²

The extent to which ground improvements were undertaken as a response to demand from spectators remains a matter for conjecture. Sutcliffe thought that there had been 'an outcry for more comfortable accommodation' prior to the First World War and that the new imposing covered grandstands at many clubs 'had been erected in answer to popular clamour'.³³ The circumstances which led to the building of Wolverhampton Wanderers' first major stand in 1925 certainly seems to accord with

²⁹ Vamplew, *Pay Up*, p. 64; Allison, 'Rise of Middlesborough FC'; *Athletic News*, 16 July 1906.

³⁰ Inglis, *Football Grounds*, p. 57; *Athletic News*, 8 March 1909.

³¹ *Athletic News*, 8 March 1909. The design of League grounds as far as improved visibility was concerned lagged far behind developments in Italy and the Americas. The first major cantilever stands, with no supporting uprights to obscure the supporters' view, were not built until the late 1950s and early 1960s. In contrast, the architect Pier Luigi Nervi built self-supporting cantilever stands at Florence's Berta Stadium in 1933 specifically to allow supporters a completely free view of the pitch. See Francesco Varrasi, 'Economia, Politica e Sport in Italia, 1925-35', *Tesi di Laurea*, Florence, 1996, pp. 353, 360, 503-07; Inglis, *Football Grounds*, pp. 19-20.

³² Circular Letter from E. L. Thompson to Oldham Athletic Shareholders, 6 December 1906; Minutes of Oldham Athletic FC, 30 July 1907.

³³ *Athletic News*, 9 January 1911.

this view. In December 1922 the club admitted that the lack of stand accommodation at Molineux had been 'commented upon and deplored' but encouraged supporters to be patient as the club had recently bought the ground and planned to undertake major ground improvements. A year later Wolves had slipped into the third division, finances were tight and the club, backed by the mayor and other local dignitaries, launched a share appeal amongst supporters to help fund the proposed developments.³⁴ Finally, with the clubs' promotion in 1925 the stand was opened. Yet the club programme's comments at the time of the official opening illustrate the way in which the rhetoric of service to the spectator was intermeshed with notions of supporter loyalty and financial profit:

With the opening of the New Stand we are provided with a means to a most desirable end, and so long as the public appreciate it, there are no limitations to its possibilities for affording comfort and enjoyment, recreation and pleasure, and at the same time yielding revenue which in course of time will bring the cost to an irreducible minimum and set it on its mission as a profit-producing concern pure and simple.³⁵

There was clearly no altruism at work here: improving facilities was widely regarded as a vital means of improving gates. Despite this, however, it appears that many clubs were reluctant to commit themselves to large-scale ground developments and that the initiative - and indeed the finance - for such schemes often came from supporters rather than the club. This is particularly true of the inter-war period and the provision of covered accommodation for standing spectators, who unlike those sitting in grandstands were generally offered no protection from the elements. Supporters clubs were especially active here in raising funds for roofs or shelters to be built on the 'popular' sides of grounds.³⁶ Yet many club directorates remained insensitive and slow to react to appeals for better provision. The minute books of Sheffield United record a number of appeals from spectators for more covered accommodation at Bramall Lane during the 1920s and 1930s but it was not until 1937 that a sub-committee was appointed to consider the question, with the result that a shelter was

³⁴ Wolverhampton Wanderers FC Programme, 9 December 1922, 15, 29 December 1923.

³⁵ Wolverhampton Wanderers FC Programme, 19 September 1925.

³⁶ Minutes of Walsall FC, 28 November 1933; Rogan Taylor, *Football and Its Fans: Supporters and their Relations with the Game, 1885-1985*, Leicester, 1992, pp. 28-31.

built on the 'Spion' Kop in time for the 1938/39 season.³⁷ Jimmy Seed, likewise, regretted the decision of his directors at Charlton Athletic not to build better covered and seated accommodation when the club reached the first division in 1937, a decision which he believed accounted for the club's subsequent poor gates.³⁸

Secondly, there were efforts to improve the spectacle of visiting a football match, though these were often limited, uneven and differed from club to club. At the majority of League grounds the only entertainment provided besides the match itself consisted of a musical programme by a local band before the kick-off and at half-time. Few clubs experimented with alternative methods of drawing spectators: the attraction of football was considered to be the game itself and so directorates tended to have little time for peripheral distractions. Aston Villa agreed to a local newspaper's request to have community singing at some derby matches but only on the proviso that it would cost the club nothing.³⁹ But plans to establish more extensive programmes of entertainment - including athletic and musical events to amuse the standing spectators in the hour or so prior to kick-off - were generally rejected or left undeveloped.⁴⁰ It is possible, however, to detect an increased accent on pre-match entertainment from the late 1920s. In 1930, for instance, the Sheffield United chairman and secretary interviewed the bandmaster of the resident Imperial Band 'with a view to improving the calibre of the Band and also a more acceptable programme being rendered'. It was subsequently decided that while the Band would still receive the annual £20 grant, its continued services would be subject to a month's trial.⁴¹ West Ham United's matchday band was less fortunate in finding itself dismissed due to the installation of public service radio equipment at Upton Park at around the same time. The east London club was not alone in replacing live music with recorded music, though the cost of installation and the acquisition of a phonographic licence turned out to be considerably higher.⁴² Indeed such was the heavy investment on the radio equipment

³⁷ Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 6 September 1927, 28 October 1936, 17 March 1937, 24 August 1938.

³⁸ Seed, *Jimmy Seed Story*, pp. 44-45.

³⁹ Minutes of Aston Villa FC, 15 March 1927.

⁴⁰ See *Topical Times*, 18 August 1923.

⁴¹ Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 2, 9 July 1930.

⁴² Minutes of West Ham United FC, 28 October 1928, 13, 19 September 1932, 11 September 1934. Also Minutes of Aston Villa FC, 27 December 1927.

that when public requests were made to replace it again with a live band, the directors refused on the grounds that they 'did not consider the extra expense for musical entertainment warranted'.⁴³

Technological advances offered opportunities to enhance the spectating experience in a variety of ways, but here again progress was cautious and partial. The erection of results boards, clocks and floodlighting were all contemplated at different times and yet generated considerable opposition in League circles. The purpose of results or score boards was initially to display the score of the match actually being played but could potentially be used to keep the spectator informed of developments throughout the country. By the early 1920s advances in telephonic communications together with press co-operation had persuaded some clubs, such as Sheffield United, to build results boards giving the half and full-time scores of selected League matches, although other clubs were reluctant to follow.⁴⁴ To boost reserve team attendances many clubs decided to keep spectators in touch with the progress of the first team in away matches by providing updates every fifteen minutes; Walsall did the same with the scores of its more prestigious neighbours Wolves and Aston Villa during first team games.⁴⁵ Another innovation intended to facilitate the crowd's ability to follow the game was the introduction of the 45-minute football clock. While Herbert Chapman, most famously, had a large 12-foot diameter clock attached to the North Stand at Highbury, other clubs refused similar proposals from watch companies. The FA, in any case, decided in October 1930 that such clocks compromised the time-keeping authority of referees and therefore ruled that they should be immediately removed.⁴⁶

The potential benefits of floodlit football for both clubs and spectators were also slow to receive official recognition. Experiments took place as early as the late nineteenth

⁴³ Minutes of West Ham United FC, 5 November 1934.

⁴⁴ Sheffield United's result board was erected in 1922, Aston Villa's followed in 1923 and West Ham United two years later. Minutes of Aston Villa, 5 December 1922, 14 August 1923; Minutes of West Ham United FC, 21, 28 July 1925.

⁴⁵ Minutes of West Ham United FC, 26 March 1935; Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 1 December 1931; Minutes of Walsall FC, 27 November 1934.

⁴⁶ Stephen Studd, *Herbert Chapman, Football Emperor: A Study in the Origins of Modern Soccer*, London, 1981, p. 109; Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 2 June 1930; Minutes of FA Council, 13 October 1930.

century but until the 1920s artificial lighting could only be used for friendlies, practices or exhibition games. By this time, however, advances in electrical lighting had proven the viability of floodlit sports events, which were already commonplace in South American football and some American sports.⁴⁷ But the immediate inspiration for renewed British experiments came from visits to continental Europe where floodlighting was developing at professional and amateur levels; after one such visit Chapman installed floodlights on Arsenal's West Stand.⁴⁸ This and other examples provoked the FA Council to respond in 1930 by prohibiting its members from taking part in competitive matches under artificial light, apparently on the grounds that clubs might be pushed into spending large sums on floodlighting which they could ill afford.⁴⁹ However, over the next few years a number of club directors and journalists began to suggest that these possible high costs could be more than balanced by the financial benefits. In this view, floodlighting offered, above all, the chance to diversify the consumption of League football by establishing it as an evening as well as an afternoon event; a particularly important step in the context of the success of dog racing and speedway as evening attractions. By the summer of 1932 a leading advocate of floodlighting, James Catton, could detect a groundswell of support amongst English and Scottish clubs, especially those who had played under lights during overseas tours. J. G. Hickling, secretary of third division Mansfield Town, believed that a relaxation of the governing body's restriction would be a 'boon' to clubs:

just imagine the gates we should have if we could have the kick-offs in the evening at 7:30 p.m. in the winter, instead of say 2:30 or 3 when the workers cannot get [out]. If we could have football played under arc light conditions it is my positive opinion that in no less than five years we should nearly double the followers of football, in consequence of which, overdrafts at banks, the bugbear of nearly all clubs, would sooner or later vanish.⁵⁰

Though few contemporaries shared Hickling's optimistic view of floodlighting as a financial panacea, it was nevertheless widely agreed that spectators would benefit

⁴⁷ Inglis, *Football Grounds*, p. 42.

⁴⁸ Studd, *Herbert Chapman*, pp. 111-12.

⁴⁹ Minutes of FA Council, 25 August 1930; Studd, *Herbert Chapman*, p. 112.

⁵⁰ Catton Folders, E-F, J. G. Hickley to Catton, 5 September 1932, p. 506.

from the greater flexibility and variety which it provided.⁵¹ In an endeavour to exploit these opportunities, then, Tottenham Hotspur orchestrated a movement of metropolitan clubs whose lobbying of the FA led to the temporary removal of the ban so as to allow a special exhibition match to be played under artificial lights at White City stadium in early 1933. The match, however, drew a disappointing crowd and a number of clubs, including West Ham, subsequently withdrew their support for a permanent removal of the ban.⁵²

The reluctance of the Football League to embrace innovations which complimented the football-watching experience can be best illustrated by the debate over the numbering of players' shirts. While the idea had been advocated numerous times from the beginning of the century, it continued to divide clubs and administrators throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Club colours, of course, had to be registered with the League secretary (see chapter 4) but additions to kits were not prohibited, so on 25 August 1928, Arsenal and Chelsea agreed to take the field simultaneously in different matches with numbers on the back of each players' shirt. On the day of the experiment, Catton issued an extended defence of shirt numbering, arguing that it was one aspect of the fundamental obligation which each League club should have towards its audience:

Modern football cannot exist without the spectator. The objects of every Association football club, engaged in League football, should be to play the game and give the greatest possible pleasure to those who throng the seats and terraces. Therefore let League clubs do all they possibly can for the convenience and comfort of their legions of followers... Hence tip-up chairs, covered accommodation, result boards, programmes, and many other devices that were never dreamed of 40 years ago.

For this reason he found it

difficult to understand why some clubs are strongly objecting to a proposed change which is of great help to everybody on all occasions. The convenience of the public should be paramount.⁵³

⁵¹ See Catton Folders, E-F, William Struth (Glasgow Rangers) to Catton, 5 September 1932, p. 506.

⁵² Minutes of FA Council, 12 December 1932; Minutes of West Ham United FC, 5 December 1932, 6 March 1933.

⁵³ Catton Folders, E-F, Newspaper cutting, 25 August 1928, p. 505.

The Chelsea directors even conducted their own market research and found that every one of the 700 fans questioned after the club's match at Swansea expressed support for numbering.⁵⁴ Yet despite the apparent success of the Arsenal-Chelsea experiment, opposition to the idea stayed firm. The League executive stepped in immediately to prevent a repetition of the incident, by 'instructing' clubs not to number shirts until the question had been discussed at a general meeting.⁵⁵ At subsequent annual meetings in 1929 and 1933 proposals to introduce compulsory numbering were rejected by large majorities. The FA had agreed to players sporting shirt numbers at the 1933 Cup Final and the cup winners Everton continued the experiment in a subsequent League match but many clubs continued to consider the cost in terms of money as well as the loss of team spirit too great; Sutcliffe himself noted that each club would probably require eight sets of numbered shirts. By the mid-1930s, however, the League stood largely alone in not permitting numbering, as many reserve competitions and junior leagues had sanctioned the idea. It finally relented in 1939, largely due to pressure from a core group of lobbyists and the support of new president William Cuff, who dismissed the notion of optional (as opposed to compulsory) numbering and carried the proposal as an instruction to clubs even though it had failed to reach the required three-quarters majority as a rule change.⁵⁶

It is fair to conclude, then, that the Management Committee was slow to incorporate and diffuse techniques designed to improve both the intrinsic and the peripheral attractions of League football. The majority of innovations, from club programmes to floodlighting, were conceived and refined at club level and often met with the considerable obstacles of executive conservatism and the in-built inertia of the legislative system. In the eyes of League administrators, football spectators or the so-called football public were a rather shadowy and ill-defined group whom they ultimately relied on for financial survival but really knew very little about. There is certainly little evidence that the League made more than token efforts to respond to spectator demands or that it encouraged its members to make the football-watching public their paramount concern. Indeed, spectators were rarely the subject of

⁵⁴ Inglis, *League Football*, p. 140.

⁵⁵ Minutes of Football League, 27 August 1928.

⁵⁶ Inglis, *League Football*, pp. 140, 164-65.

committee discussions or newspaper columns and in this sense remained marginalised by administrators and directors throughout the period. The League's own rules and regulations made only two significant concessions to supporters. First, the executive insisted that clubs fielded full strength teams whenever possible and fined those who failed to do so. Initially fines were limited to £150 but after Newcastle United was fined the unprecedented sum of £750 for playing weakened teams in no less than seven League matches prior to its FA Cup Final appearance in 1924, the executive was empowered to penalise guilty clubs according to its discretion.⁵⁷ The Newcastle case particularly enraged League officials, who regarded it as a serious affront to the primacy of the League in respect of all other competitions, including the FA Cup. But it also raised the matter of the responsibility of clubs to their audience. *Athletic News* reported that spectators who had watched the Tyneside club's heavy 6-1 and 4-1 defeats at Aston Villa and Birmingham respectively 'were much aggrieved that they had paid the full admission money to watch the reserves of Newcastle'.⁵⁸ For these reasons the executive also took pre-emptive action on occasions when clubs were rumoured to be fielding second rather than first choice elevens in League fixtures.⁵⁹ Second, clubs were forced to comply with the pre-arranged kick-off times agreed by the League collectively and advertised in the press. Before World War One the Management Committee issued a series of warnings to clubs who began games before the scheduled starting time - 'thus breaking faith with their supporters' - but drew back from penalising them formally.⁶⁰ In 1920 Southend was explicitly ordered to advertise the kick-off time of home matches and to ensure that this was adhered to but other clubs evidently continued to start matches 'some minutes before the advertised time of kick-off'.⁶¹ Most of these irregularities had been stamped out by the 1930s but it is instructive that League clubs still assumed some flexibility to modify the timing of matches irrespective of the likely demand of supporters for fixed and routine kick-offs.

⁵⁷ Minutes of Football League, 12 May 1924; Minutes of Aston Villa FC, 13 May 1924; *Athletic News*, 9 June 1924.

⁵⁸ *Athletic News*, 26 May 1924.

⁵⁹ See Minutes of Football League, 22 April 1932.

⁶⁰ Minutes of Football League, 9 February 1914.

⁶¹ Minutes of Football League, 20 December 1920; 2 October 1925.

3. Advertising, Broadcasting and the Press

Away from the game itself and the arena in which it was played, clubs attempted to attract spectators using a variety of methods employed by conventional firms. Though it is difficult to assess its precise impact, advertising became a particularly important means of stimulating demand and thereby increasing crowds. It had developed from its rudimentary stages in the early to mid-nineteenth century into a full-scale industry by the turn of the century and though football clubs preferred to distance themselves from the overt commercialism of Pear's soap or Bovril, they nevertheless operated in an environment where advertising 'had become essential for any firm seeking to break into a market, to move from a local to a national market, or, in many cases, to hold on to its existing market'.⁶² Elaborate promotional techniques certainly filtered through to sectors of the entertainment industry. Cinema owners, in particular, often erected huge displays in the foyer or the environs of their buildings specifically to advertise new features, and incorporated the showmanship and theatrical tactics used by department stores in the inter-war period to pull in more customers. All this was then supplemented by carefully constructed newspaper advertisements designed by professional advertising firms and writers.⁶³

The use of advertising by Football League clubs, however, was far less sophisticated. Promotional activity was generally based around bill-posting and newspaper advertising of forthcoming matches and directorates tried to keep this form of expenditure within strict limits. Walsall spent just £144 of a total expenditure of well over £8,000 on printing and advertising in 1933/34 and the more successful clubs devoted an even smaller percentage.⁶⁴ Money was often saved by arranging a form of mutual advertising with local theatres or other entertainment venues. At the beginning of the century Sheffield United, for instance, allowed three local theatres to send sandwich boards around the pitch on Saturdays in return for the announcement of the club's next match on a bioscope or in the theatre programme each evening. Such arrangements evidently lasted into the 1930s, though the increasing competitiveness

⁶² W. Hamish Fraser, *The Coming of the Mass Market, 1850-1914*, London, 1981, p. 146.

⁶³ See Richards, *Dream Palace*, pp. 21-22; Bill Lancaster, *The Department Store: A Social History*, London, 1995, pp. 74, 96-98.

⁶⁴ Walsall FC, Annual Report of Directors for AGM, 1934, 522/1/23.

of football advertising was reflected in West Ham's agreement with the Stratford Empire that it would pay a small fee to have the details of forthcoming games exhibited on a slide, providing no other club was permitted to advertise.⁶⁵ Another popular outlet for advertising football matches was the railway station or similar transport facilities. Arrangements were invariably made with railway companies to display bill posters of first teams matches. In preparation for the 1933/34 season Sheffield United arranged with the London and North Eastern Railway Company to have 50 posters at 4 *d.* each displayed at stations in and around Sheffield.⁶⁶ West Ham was one of a number of League clubs in the capital with long-standing advertising rights on the underground railway network but from 1934 London clubs were no longer entitled to individual advertisements at mainline stations and paid instead for inclusion on a shared 'Football' notice.⁶⁷

Yet throughout this period newspapers continued to be the major area for advertising. Clubs had used small newspaper advertisements to publicise matches even before the establishment of the Football League but the close relationship forged between many League clubs and their local newspapers had by the twentieth century created broader promotional opportunities. First of all, mutual advertising arrangements were often established between clubs and local newspapers. The *Sheffield Telegraph*, for example, charged United half the usual price for first team advertisements in return for the display of its sandwich board at these fixtures: a perfect illustration of the symbiotic relationship between sport and the press.⁶⁸ By 1932 the Sheffield club had expanded its first team advertisements from single to double columns in both the *Sheffield Telegraph* and the *Sheffield Independent* and at the same time re-designed its bill-posters. The board went further by taking out a special whole page advertisement in the *Green 'Un* for the opening matches of the 1938/39 season.⁶⁹ It must be remembered, however, that while Sheffield United and others were able to advertise

⁶⁵ Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 13 November 1907; 9 September, 21 October 1908; 20 August 1912; Minutes of West Ham United FC, 12 June 1934.

⁶⁶ Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 5 September, 30 August 1933.

⁶⁷ Minutes of West Ham United FC, 17 November 1919; 13 August 1923; 4 September 1934.

⁶⁸ Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 22 February, 1 March 1911.

⁶⁹ Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 30 November 1932; 24 August 1938.

throughout the season, clubs with smaller budgets had to target their advertising at specific games.⁷⁰

League clubs did not of course gain publicity in the press simply by buying official advertising space. Match reports and results, discussion columns and other features all undoubtedly contributed to a form of free advertising for clubs and this was as true of the local, and increasingly the national, dailies as the specialist sporting press.⁷¹ In short, by the turn of the century clubs relied on press coverage of League football to generate interest and stimulate demand and therefore made various efforts to accommodate them. By 1911 Sheffield United was granting free press tickets to local newspapers (the *Sheffield Telegraph* and the *Sheffield Independent*), to specialist sporting papers (*Athletic News*, *Sporting News*) and to national dailies and weeklies (the *Daily Mail*, *Daily Mirror* and *Reynold's News*), although photographic privileges were more tightly guarded.⁷² Reporting was also facilitated by the construction of press boxes and the installation of private telephones at the club's expense. Even the lower division clubs were expected to have these facilities: one of the first building projects planned by the Ipswich Town directorate following election to the third division was a press box.⁷³ There is indeed considerable evidence to support Fishwick's view that there existed a cosy and almost 'special relationship' between local journalism and the major clubs in a given area. The inclusion of local journalists in the club's travel party to away matches was common and there can be little doubt that certain journalists were privy to inside information obtained directly from club directors and officials.⁷⁴ Moreover, West Ham United was arranging 'press nights' - a rudimentary forerunner of the modern press conference - to officially unveil new stands or new signings during the 1920s. This seems to have been the first step in a new systematic attitude towards publicity within the club. From January 1931 members of the press were to be issued with a 'news bulletin' the day after board meetings by the assistant secretary Alan Searles and by 1933 the new player's

⁷⁰ See Minutes of Oldham Athletic FC, 4 January 1938.

⁷¹ See Tony Mason, 'All the Winners and Half-Times', *The Sports Historian*, 13, May 1993, pp. 3-13.

⁷² Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 23, 30 August, 5 September 1911.

⁷³ Minutes of Ipswich Town FC, 8 August 1939. For the development of telephones, boxes and other facilities for the press see Minutes of West Ham United FC, 14 August 1922; 6 August 1925; Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 9, 15 November 1904.

⁷⁴ Fishwick, *English Football*, p. 98.

manager Charlie Paynter had been given sole responsibility to 'give and seek publicity on *team* matters', with Searles controlling administrative, financial and other publicity.⁷⁵

But it would be wrong to assume that changes of this kind were motivated by a new atmosphere of openness and co-operation: quite the opposite, they were intended to control more tightly the flow of information to the press and to avoid negative publicity. At West Ham the reorganisation of publicity matters was a reaction to 'the surfeit of publicity' caused by the acrimonious dismissal of long-standing secretary Syd King, which the board agreed 'should in future be avoided'.⁷⁶ The Oldham Athletic directors similarly tried to determine the information given to the press about the club's financial problems in 1939 through official statements but tended instead to be drawn into denying inaccurate stories or misleading articles.⁷⁷ Moreover, the League itself attempted to keep certain confidential matters - such as the precise size of transfer fees and the contents of retain and transfer lists together with attendances and gate receipts - from the gaze of the press. Clubs were instructed by the Management Committee not to disclose such information to newspapers and held them responsible for breach of confidence if they did so; they were even encouraged to send communications relating to transfers under sealed cover.⁷⁸ But this did not prevent regular leaks and so in April 1930 the first and second division clubs pledged 'themselves not to divulge confidential matters' and requested the Committee 'to take the strongest measures possible to suppress the practice'. Less than a year later the president had to admit that the League itself 'could do nothing' to stop the press gathering private information and instead advised the clubs to prevent this themselves.⁷⁹ By the 1930s, however, it was becoming more and more difficult to ration the information given to the press. Newspapers like the *People* and the *News of*

⁷⁵ Minutes of West Ham United FC, 28 July 1925; 6 January 1931; 20 December 1932, 24 January 1933.

⁷⁶ Minutes of West Ham United FC, 15 November 1932.

⁷⁷ Minutes of Oldham Athletic FC, 1, 8 March 1939.

⁷⁸ Minutes of Football League, 3 June 1912; 2 February 1914; 11 November 1927.

⁷⁹ Report of Meeting of Football League Clubs, First and Second Division, 4 April 1930; Minutes of Football League Shareholders Meeting, First and Second Division, 6 March 1931.

the World, which were increasingly eager to secure a transfer exclusive, were clearly less likely to respect confidentiality than were local journalists.⁸⁰

While the League executive could hardly ignore this mounting clamour for information, its relationship with the press remained restricted and awkward. Press representatives were permitted to attend most ordinary and extraordinary general meetings from the 1890s but the meetings of the Management Committee and gatherings of sub-groups like the third division sections and the unofficial *ad hoc* regional club meetings (see chapter 4) were kept strictly private. Journalists were normally excluded when contentious issues were being discussed, such as during the 'Pools War' meetings in February and March 1936. In a passage from his Jubilee History, Sutcliffe described how in the course of one of these meetings

a shadow was seen to pass across the glass lights on a floor above, where a window was discovered to be open, and investigations resulted in the discovery of a photographer and reporter from a prominent newspaper, who had succeeded in getting shots and notes of what had been transpiring. These gentlemen afterwards appeared in the meeting, apologised for their action, and surrendered their notes and plates.⁸¹

It is indeed evident that the League was slow to advance public relations at its meetings. The *Athletic News* reporter noted that at the 1930 annual meeting 'The room was far too small, and the arrangements for the visitors unworthy of an organisation of such importance as the League, who might also remember that it is essential that the Press should be in a position to hear.'⁸² Yet close relationships were fostered with favoured sections of the press - particularly *Athletic News* and other northern sporting papers - as well as with individual reporters. James Catton was certainly in regular correspondence with members of the Management Committee during and after his editorship of the Manchester weekly, while Ivan Sharpe was similarly close to Sutcliffe and other League figures. Sharpe's memoirs reveal that Sutcliffe often discussed future plans with the journalist and trusted him with confidential information. The two travelled to football functions together and

⁸⁰ Fishwick, *English Football*, pp. 98, 100-07.

⁸¹ Sutcliffe *et al.*, *Football League*, p. 41.

⁸² Report of Football League AGM in *Athletic News*, 9 June 1930.

throughout the 1930s met regularly for coffee, when Sutcliffe would provide exclusive stories for Sharpe's column in the *Sunday Chronicle*. Sharpe was also 'among the last of his football friends to talk to Charles Sutcliffe'.⁸³

But close associations of this kind were hardly the norm: the League executive generally distrusted the press, especially those southern newspapers which remained staunchly critical of its policy and objectives. Periodicals such as *C. B. Fry's Magazine* and *The Rapid Review* continued to regard elite professional football with distaste well into the twentieth century and to identify the League as the professional game's primary exemplar.⁸⁴ And even newspapers with established sympathies towards the League could at times be critical of its policy. *Athletic News*, which by its own admission had 'stood by The League and done all in its power to support the game, the clubs and the players'⁸⁵ was nevertheless prepared to oppose the Management Committee when it saw fit and, under Sharpe's editorship from 1924 (notwithstanding his personal friendship with Sutcliffe and others), certainly became a less faithful apologist for the League.

Press criticism was also perceived by directors and Committeemen as a perennial problem. Most clubs were highly sensitive to newspaper articles which called into question team selection or financial and administrative decisions. In extreme cases this could lead to reporters being banned from the ground but more commonly clubs would simply inform the newspaper of its objections. The directors of Sheffield United took criticism particularly seriously, meeting the proprietors of the *Telegraph* in 1913 to discuss a series of adverse reports and actually ensuring in 1930 that the same proprietors agreed to an 'alteration of their attitude to the Club'.⁸⁶ Even a brief survey of club minute books reveals that instances of this kind were hardly exceptional: West Ham had similar problems with misrepresentative articles while Oldham Athletic informed the editor of the *Oldham Chronicle* in early 1939 that it

⁸³ Catton Folders, *passim*.; Sharpe, *40 Years in Football*, pp. 157-59; PFA, File 33, Hartley to Fay, 6 February 1939.

⁸⁴ See *Athletic News*, 25 March 1907.

⁸⁵ *Athletic News*, 1 May 1916.

⁸⁶ Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 25 June 1913; 2, 9 September 1930.

was 'very dissatisfied with the local reporter and his adverse criticisms and reports'.⁸⁷ The club's mistrust of the *Chronicle* was compounded three months later when the Friday evening edition told readers incorrectly that there was no match at Boundary Park the following day.⁸⁸

Even in the face of their undoubted interlocking interests, there were various ways in which the relationship between League football and the press could become strained. First, the display of half-time, full-time and fifteen minute scores on results boards necessitated a degree of co-operation with those press agencies and newspapers which had acquired the appropriate technology. The Sheffield clubs encountered some difficulties in 1923 when the local manager of the Express News Agency which supplied the final scores at Bramall Lane and Hillsborough was told by his head office to discontinue the arrangement so as not to damage the sales of football specials. After appeals to the FA and the League and long negotiations, the *Telegraph* and *Independent* newspapers eventually arranged with United and Wednesday directors to take over the supply of final results.⁸⁹ This scenario was repeated at many clubs across the country, where the aim to inform supporters of the latest scores at the ground itself seemed to collide head-on with the interests of the press.⁹⁰ In general, workable forms of co-operation were reached, even if these sometimes involved small payments by the club. Second, the importance of press coverage to the continued growth and prosperity of the League enabled newspapers to wield a small but significant degree of influence in the scheduling of fixtures. In fact, the move towards standardised kick-off times was in part prompted by an appeal made to the Management Committee in 1921 by the Newspaper Press Ltd. to begin matches before 3 p.m. on Saturdays so that the football specials could include full reports in addition to final scores. The Committee agreed to the request in principle but at the subsequent annual meeting the London members, who argued that an earlier kick-off would effect their gate revenue, forced a compromise that the latest time of kick-off should be 3:15; the following year the Committee was given discretionary power to

⁸⁷ Minutes of West Ham United FC, 9 April 1923; Minutes of Oldham Athletic FC, 4 January 1939.

⁸⁸ Minutes of Oldham Athletic FC, 19 April 1939.

⁸⁹ Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 4, 12, 19, 26 September, 10 October 1923.

⁹⁰ For instance, Minutes of West Ham United FC, 29 September 1925.

sanction later starts on application but 2:45, 3 or 3:15 remained the standard kick-off times.⁹¹

The rapid growth of film and radio broadcasting in the second half of the period generated a further influential medium intent on using top level football to increase audiences. Unlike with the press, however, the attitude of the football authorities towards broadcasting remained ambivalent, because while it offered unprecedented opportunities to promote the game to larger sections of the public than could feasibly visit a football ground, it carried at the same time the potential to damage existing support. Why, it was widely asked, would people pay to attend matches when they could watch or listen to them elsewhere? Indeed, for the League and many of its clubs broadcasting was perceived more as a problem than an opportunity and thus the natural response was to oppose rather than co-operate.

Film companies had used football material from the early days of the Football League but the role of newsreels in the cinema boom of the 1920s and 1930s increased its importance. By the latter decade almost all cinema performances were preceded by Pathe or British Movietone newsreels and it has been estimated that some 30 per cent of these featured highlights of sporting events, a significant portion of which we can speculate were football matches. In the main, clubs do not appear to have opposed these developments, mainly because newsreels offered only brief highlights and could only be shown after the match: as Fishwick notes, they 'complemented rather than competed with football'.⁹² Thus the major issue for clubs was not the filming itself but payment. As early as 1910 Aston Villa allowed the local Aston Theatre to film a League match as a special privilege but thereafter established a standard charge of 5 guineas.⁹³ The West Ham United board decided to charge 3 guineas from 1920 but this was essentially to cover the minor costs involved in accommodating the cinematographical equipment. But by 1933 the east London club had changed tack by attempting to sell cinema rights to cup-ties for at least £20, again ostensibly because

⁹¹ Minutes of Football League, 11, 30 May 1921 (AGM); 29 May 1922 (AGM). Sheffield United arranged for a significant number of its League matches to kick-off at 2:45. For example, Minutes, 24 October 1923.

⁹² Fishwick, *English Football*, pp. 107, 110.

⁹³ Minutes of Aston Villa FC, 23, 30 August, 25 October 1910.

of 'the inconvenience caused by the apparatus'.⁹⁴ The board had to reduce the fee to £5 when the newsreel companies refused to pay and the following year Paramount News even objected to paying this 'as they had been granted free facilities elsewhere'.⁹⁵ Huddersfield Town and Sheffield United evidently felt that co-operation could benefit and promote the club and thus tended to grant unconditional filming permission whenever they were asked.⁹⁶

Radio broadcasting was an altogether more contentious issue, partly because its impact was felt across the four divisions of the League and not just at the leading clubs. Initially the BBC's educative mandate made it reluctant to broadcast sport in general, and professional football in particular, and the concentration of wireless sets and licences within the broadly defined middle class probably underlined this tendency. Things changed, however, as radio came within the grasp of lower-income families while at the same time the BBC's national profile together with its attitude to popular entertainment became more defined. The sale of wireless licences rose from just two million in 1927 to nine million in 1939, and of this number the corporation estimated that some 6.2 million were owned by families with annual incomes of £208 and below.⁹⁷ Similarly, pressed by public demand, the BBC extended its transmission of entertainment programmes in the mid to late 1920s, and though sport was not regarded in this sense specifically as entertainment, its national focus made it an ideal target for a corporation anxious to highlight its national credentials. So from 1925 the BBC developed its first proposals to broadcast live sports events and within two years the first live outside broadcast of a League match had taken place, closely followed by the 1927 FA Cup Final.⁹⁸

At first the response of clubs was extremely cautious. The BBC applied directly to the clubs themselves for broadcast rights and the decision was always left in the hands of

⁹⁴ Minutes of West Ham United FC, 16 August 1920; 24 January 1933.

⁹⁵ Minutes of West Ham United FC, 27 February 1933; 2, 16 January 1934.

⁹⁶ Minutes of Huddersfield Town FC, 13 December 1938, 25 January, 15 February 1939; Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 16 August 1933, 15, 27 September 1937, 19 January 1938.

⁹⁷ Asa Briggs, *The BBC: The First Fifty Years*, Oxford, 1985, p. 113.

⁹⁸ Paddy Scannell and David Cardiff, 'Serving the Nation: Public Service Broadcasting before the War' in Bernard Waites, Tony Bennett and Graham Martin (eds), *Popular Culture: Past and Present*, London, 1982, p. 178; Briggs, *The BBC*, pp. 71-72; Fishwick, *English Football*, p. 107.

the hosts. Sheffield United, which had been the visiting team for the first commentary broadcast at Arsenal in January, agreed to a broadcast from Bramall Lane in February but refused a similar request a month later. Birmingham, too, acceded at first but in October 1927 it prohibited further broadcasts, feeling that 'on wet days at any rate' it could be harmful to gates.⁹⁹ Other clubs tried a number of methods to ensure that they would suffer no financial loss. Aston Villa's directors refused to allow the BBC to broadcast from their ground unless the club was paid a fee of £20, while Huddersfield Town attempted unsuccessfully to include a no publicity clause in its agreement with the corporation so that spectators would not be aware of the broadcast and thus attendances would remain unaffected.¹⁰⁰ By early 1929 the Huddersfield board too had informed BBC representatives that running commentaries of matches would cease 'unless a monetary offer was forthcoming'.¹⁰¹ The BBC recognised the widespread opposition to broadcasting and directed Gerald Cock, its Director of Outside Broadcasting, to make personal visits to pacify the so-called 'antagonistic clubs'.¹⁰² Influence within the football world was also used in an unsuccessful attempt to convince Huddersfield to rethink its policy towards broadcasting when Herbert Chapman, a personal friend of Cock's, was asked to make an expenses-paid trip to his former club in order to explain the BBC's viewpoint.¹⁰³

Nevertheless the BBC was unable to convince the League executive and most clubs of the benefits of broadcasting as a means of popularising the game. As a BBC representative in Sheffield noted, 'the point of view of the clubs is that we are getting something for nothing at the risk of a falling off of their gate money'.¹⁰⁴ Sutcliffe's opposition to broadcasting was similarly unequivocal:

⁹⁹ Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 9 February, 30 March, 6 September 1927; S. D. (Birmingham) to Mr. Graves (Programme Executive), 8 October 1927, BBC OB, Aston Villa Ground, 1927-58.

¹⁰⁰ S. D. (Birmingham) to Mr. Nicholls (London S. D.), 3 September 1927, BBC OB, Aston Villa Ground, 1927-58; Broadcasting Agreement between Huddersfield Town FC and the BBC, 1 November 1927; Programme Executive to S. D. (Manchester), 11 November 1927, BBC OB, Huddersfield Football Ground 1: 1927-41.

¹⁰¹ North Regional Director to O. B. Director, 24 January 1929, BBC OB, Huddersfield Football Ground 1, 1927-41.

¹⁰² Programme Executive to S. D. (Manchester), 11 November 1927, BBC OB, Huddersfield Football Ground 1, 1927-41.

¹⁰³ Gerald Cock, Internal Memo, 22 February 1928, BBC OB, Huddersfield Football Ground 1, 1927-41.

¹⁰⁴ Quoted in Fishwick, *English Football*, p. 108.

I could never understand football clubs having anything to do with broadcasting football games whilst the game is in progress. A few tried it on but soon found that broadcasting football did not... attract... listeners in to becoming supporters of the game (sic.). How could it? When the weather is cold and the elements unkind, a man must be an enthusiast to turn up at the match, but it really needs no enthusiasm to sit at ease with slippers on, peacefully smoking and listening in.¹⁰⁵

Moreover, in his view it was 'absurd to expect clubs to build stands and spend money to attract the public and then arrange for a broadcast especially designed to keep them at home'.¹⁰⁶ The fear of reduced gate receipts was felt hardest by the poorer clubs, especially those in the third division north. By May 1928 they had requested the Management Committee and the FA Council to prohibit broadcasting entirely and reacted angrily against the FA's decision to allow the transmission of the 1930 Cup Final after a ban in 1929. E. Clayton, spokesmen for the northern clubs, protested to the FA that the broadcast 'will cause a very serious loss to our Clubs... as when the Final was last broadcasted (sic.) our gate receipts were considerably below the average'.¹⁰⁷ Opposition mounted until by early 1931 few clubs were prepared to openly condone broadcasts. In March of that year a large majority of League members declared themselves 'against broadcasting' and at the annual meeting it was agreed that 'in the interest of the smaller Clubs, Broadcasting of League matches be prohibited'. At the same time an official request was sent to the FA Council to likewise prohibit cup-tie broadcasts.¹⁰⁸

The advocates of broadcasting, led by the BBC, launched a powerful counter-offensive with the aim of pressuring the League into a climb down. Cock wrote letters to the League and the FA emphasising the BBC's principal claims for a reversal of the ban: that broadcasting provided the blind, incapacitated and elderly the chance to experience the excitement of the game; that it did not, in fact, affect the gates of the clubs involved in commentaries, those situated nearby or smaller clubs struggling for gate revenue; and, conversely, that running commentaries could actually stimulate

¹⁰⁵ *Topical Times*, 19 May 1928.

¹⁰⁶ *Topical Times*, 11 June 1932.

¹⁰⁷ Minutes of FA Finance and General Purposes Committee, 25 April 1930.

¹⁰⁸ Minutes of Football League, 6 March 1931(SGM); 1 June 1931 (AGM).

interest in the game.¹⁰⁹ He also included a summary of figures purporting to prove conclusively that crowds in all four division of the League had not in fact dropped on those Saturdays when matches had been transmitted, though Sutcliffe later argued that the figures were based on newspaper estimates 'which were all wrong and seriously wrong'.¹¹⁰ In addition, the BBC claimed to have the backing of both the general public in the form of thousands of listeners as well as regular football spectators and club shareholders. Yet the League was hardly likely to be convinced by arguments stressing its moral responsibility to the public or those implying that the BBC, like the League, was fundamentally interested in widening public interest in football. Indeed, Sutcliffe and others had already doubted that the BBC's interest in the game stretched beyond immediate listening audiences. Significantly, however, there were some voices within the League who defended broadcasting on the grounds of its unique publicity value. Arsenal's George Allison, a veteran of nearly 100 commentaries at the time of the League ban, was probably its leading critic, reminding his colleagues in newspaper columns and numerous after-dinner speeches that

any national advertiser would jump at the opportunity of a two-hour talk about his product on a Saturday afternoon. Soccer football... was allowing Rugby Football to steal its advertising medium, because Rugby was getting on the air. Revenues would not be affected, the circulations of newspapers would not diminish, and tens of thousands would be happier for the thrill a soccer broadcast gave them.¹¹¹

But Allison's propaganda campaign was never powerful enough to alter the obstinacy of the Football League. The ban on League broadcasting remained operative throughout the 1930s and, in fact, both the Management Committee and many of its clubs agitated extensively to end the Cup Final broadcast. Attempts in 1933 failed and during the 1935/36 season Sutcliffe led another unsuccessful movement through the machinery of the FA Council to prohibit live transmission of the tie or, as an alternative, to enable clubs to re-diffuse the commentary at their grounds so that attendances would be less likely to suffer.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Gerald Cock to Frederick Wall, 3 September 1931, FA Minute Book 1931/32.

¹¹⁰ *Topical Times*, 11 June 1932.

¹¹¹ Allison, *Allison Calling*, pp. 56-58.

¹¹² Minutes of FA Council, 24 June 1933; 7 October, 16 December 1935, 13, 30 January 1936; Minutes of West Ham United FC, 18 July 1933; Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 3 July 1933.

For the most part, the relationship between the League and the BBC remained strained throughout this period. In 1934 Cock reminded the BBC Controller of Programming of the need to distinguish between the FA, who co-operated with broadcasting plans and were thus 'our friends', and the obstructionist 'enemy', the League: 'They will neither allow (nor give reasons for refusing) their matches to be broadcast.'¹¹³ Certain concessions were made by Preston, such as the granting of broadcasts to Empire listeners after 1936, but even here the Management Committee insisted that the BBC should reapply for permission each year.¹¹⁴ The Committee's insistence on its right to prohibit the broadcasting of any match involving a League club or player, including cup-ties and international fixtures, continually frustrated BBC officials, making it difficult to construct reliable programming schedules. In January 1938, for instance, the League executive stepped in to scupper arrangements to broadcast a number of cup replays on Wednesday afternoons on the grounds that this would clash with rearranged League fixtures. It is significant that this decision appeared to overturn both a previous FA resolution and the wishes of the clubs, who had informally indicated their agreement to the BBC's proposal by a clear majority.¹¹⁵ Yet while it was generally admitted within Shepherd's Bush that the League 'have always been difficult', this did nothing to dampen attempts to improve relations. Indeed, it was decided in 1938 that the corporation would donate 100 guineas to the League's Jubilee Fund, although a League request to broadcast part of the Jubilee Banquet was eventually turned down after considerable debate.¹¹⁶ The outbreak of war finally persuaded the Management Committee to permit broadcasts so as to boost morale at home but even under these circumstances it was noted that some clubs were reluctant to co-operate, believing 'that this may be the thin end of the wedge and that we [the BBC] shall try to take advantage of the situation after the war is over'.¹¹⁷

¹¹³ Gerald Cock, Internal Memo, 20 November 1934, BBC OB, Football File 1, 1933-1946.

¹¹⁴ Football League Circular, November 1936; Fred Howarth to S. J. de' Lotbiniere, 15 December 1936; Howarth to John Snagge, 16 July 1937, BBC OB, Football League Ltd. File 1a, 1936-1946; Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 25 November 1936.

¹¹⁵ de' Lotbiniere to Howarth, 7 January 1938; Howarth to de' Lotbiniere, 8 January 1938; de' Lotbiniere to Howarth, 10 January, 1938, BBC OB, Football League Ltd File 1a, 1936-1946.

¹¹⁶ S. J. de' Lotbiniere, Internal Memos, 18 January, 8 March, 17 June 1938; de' Lotbiniere to Howarth, 31 March 1938, BBC OB, Football League Ltd File 1a, 1936-1946.

¹¹⁷ Michael Standing to Howarth, 16 October 1939, BBC OB, Football League Ltd File 1a, 1936-1946.

It is essential to point out that the Football League's attitude to broadcasting was not the aberration it is sometimes presented as, but had parallels in other sectors of the entertainment industry. Few theatre or variety proprietors were sufficiently far-sighted at first to adopt the equivalent of the Allison viewpoint: that broadcasting would stimulate interest in entertainment and lead to an increase rather than a decline in live attendance. As early as 1923 a coalition of theatre managers and employees together with composers, music publishers and copyright owners had been formed to campaign for the prohibition of live broadcasts. Even where agreements were reached, broadcasting was strictly limited so as to avoid damaging audiences. Thus in 1925 a group of West End theatre managers sanctioned brief stage broadcasts at specified times but banned the transmission of cabaret performances during theatre hours. But the industry as a whole remained aloof and important theatrical agencies, such as Moss Empires, and the General Theatre Corporation, along with major theatre chains like Oswald Stoll's, continued to place periodic bans on broadcasts by their contracted artistes or on their stages. So, in common with the Football League, opposition to broadcasting in general, and the BBC in particular, continued throughout the 1920s and much of the 1930s and only declined as the BBC began to develop its own material and star performers within a separate Variety Department; an option obviously less appropriate to the broadcasting of sport.¹¹⁸

4. Beyond Preston: The Promotion of the League in English Society

Though the Football League was essentially an administrative body concerned with organising a sporting competition, its ambit was never confined solely to the football or sporting world. League clubs were in one sense members of a national sporting competition or an economic cartel but they were also located within communities, cities and regions and so interacted with a myriad of different voluntary, commercial and governmental bodies. At an executive level the League also operated in a wider social sphere through its negotiations with transport authorities, government departments and other bodies in an attempt to improve conditions for its member clubs. Moreover, like any other organisation in the public eye, the League

¹¹⁸ Briggs, *The BBC*, pp. 70-71; Scannell and Cardiff, 'Serving the Nation', pp. 178-82.

endeavoured to maintain a positive image by contributing to charities and other good causes. In this sense the Football League really was a *social* and not purely a *sporting* institution.

From the start the League relied on a viable transport infrastructure to take spectators, players, officials and journalists to and from matches easily and cheaply. At an individual club level this meant the development of an adequate municipal tramway or bus system which could transport spectators from outlying districts directly or as conveniently as possible to the ground. To this end clubs negotiated with local authorities on a regular basis. Thus when it was announced in 1902 that the Sheffield Tramways system was to be extended from both railway stations, the United club lobbied the City Tramways Committee to ensure that the route was changed to pass close to Bramall Lane.¹¹⁹ In an attempt to broaden its base of support, Oldham Athletic requested the neighbouring Rochdale and Ashton Corporation to run special football trams to the ground on matchdays and Walsall similarly called for extra buses to be provided for particularly important games.¹²⁰ Yet the lobbying of the larger transport companies and national bodies required a more organised and centralised approach for which the Management Committee came to assume responsibility. In 1913 the Committee presented a memorial to the Clearing House of Railway Companies requesting cheaper railway fares for football parties and subsequently secured excursion rates on most trips.¹²¹ Transport difficulties multiplied after the First World War when petrol shortages and a railway strike seriously threatened the fixture schedule and many clubs were forced to travel via the more expensive and less convenient road network. The importance of gaining concessions on ticket rates in this context led to more concerted pressure being placed on the railway companies and also the Ministry of Transport, leading to a number of official meetings, secured by the MP and Arsenal chairman Sir Henry Norris; a crucial figure of contact for the League with the wider governmental and political arena.¹²²

¹¹⁹ Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 12 November 1902.

¹²⁰ Minutes of Oldham Athletic FC, 20 August 1907; Minutes of Walsall FC, 20 March 1934.

¹²¹ Minutes of Football League, 26 May 1913.

¹²² *Athletic News*, 7, 14 March 1921.

Thus during the early 1920s the League executive lobbied hard to ensure its recognition by the railway companies for special treatment. In October 1919 Fred Rinder produced a meticulous dossier detailing the average mileage travelled on the rail network by each League club and its supporters in an attempt to convince the companies of the economic value of football travel.¹²³ But the Railway Executive Committee initially refused even to meet League representatives and it took the influence of Norris, as well as technical improvements in the availability of rolling stock, to secure the return in June 1921 to the pre-war arrangement of excursion rates for football club parties.¹²⁴ Along with prices, the issues of conditions of travel and comfort were ones which clubs individually, and the League collectively, sought to emphasise. Rinder had noted that while reduced fares were crucial to the poorer clubs, 'our great point should be to endeavour to obtain greater facilities in the actual journeys, by Saloons if this can be possibly done, but at all events by means of reserved compartments'.¹²⁵ Although Rinder's aims were partly achieved and after 1921 few clubs had still to endure a situation whereby players would have to stand for long journeys in smoking compartments, bad railway journeys remained a major source of complaint to the Management Committee. In early 1926, for example, it was decided that the League secretary should contact all relevant railway companies on the general issue of 'unsatisfactory Saloon arrangements', especially the widespread problem of inadequate heating, and log all future complaints from clubs.¹²⁶ But while the League had an indirect line to the railway authorities, initially through Norris and later as a result of the FA's inclusion on committees and panels concerned with travel rates, its influence was always limited. At the level of central or national government, independent action rarely had much effect and so it had to act in concert with other sporting associations, as it did in 1919, in order to achieve its aims.¹²⁷

¹²³ Catton Folders, A-B, Chart showing Railway Mileage of Football League Clubs and Spectators, October 1919, p. 36; *Athletic News*, 13 October 1919.

¹²⁴ Minutes of Football League, 1 April, 17 June 1921.

¹²⁵ Catton Folders, A-B, Fred Rinder to Catton, 6 October 1919, p. 36.

¹²⁶ Minutes of Football League, 11 January 1926. Also see Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, 1 December 1925; Minutes of Aston Villa FC, 27 December 1927.

¹²⁷ Minutes of FA Finance and General Purposes Committee, 6 June 1932; *Athletic News*, 13 October 1919.

It was not uncommon for the Football League to lobby government agencies or authorities on a number of issues which impinged in some way on its activity. In general, this would take the form simply of encouraging member clubs to contact the relevant departments or to attempt to influence the local MP, as it did with the Ready Money Betting Bill in 1920, the Daylight Saving Bill four years later and Norris' endeavours to have the Entertainment Tax reduced.¹²⁸ Sometimes, however, the Management Committee would actually take up the case of a member in difficulties, as it did on a number of occasions when clubs came into conflict with the Inland Revenue on tax issues. Thus the executive stepped in when Tottenham was threatened with action by the Inland Revenue Commissioners on the question of ground depreciation. During the war, the Committee again conducted a year long fight with the Inland Revenue - ending in a successful court case - on behalf of those clubs who had been charged tax on the small five per cent contributions they paid to the League for administrative and charitable purposes.¹²⁹

Nowhere was the Football League's wider public profile more salient than in its charitable activities. The emphasis placed by the League on giving to the distressed and needy outside football was perfectly consistent with the actions of private bodies and prominent individuals at the time, for whom philanthropy represented an important public gesture. As James Walvin has argued of the earlier Victorian era: 'Charitable activity became a characteristic feature of propertied life: to be broadcast aloud, emblazoned in the press, and chiseled onto the side of public places and monuments... It was almost as if the act of giving had to be public to be effective'.¹³⁰ Yet for the League there was an additional dimension: by giving to charity it was hoped that the 'myth' of the League as a purely selfish and businesslike institution could be exploded once and for all; an objective which gained additional intensity in the context of the negative press and public reaction to the League's decision to complete the 1914/15 season when other sports bodies had stopped playing

¹²⁸ *Athletic News*, 14 June 1920; Minutes of Football League, 12 April 1922; 10 March 1924.

¹²⁹ Minutes of Football League, 3, 24 February 1913; Minutes of Sheffield United Football Committee, November 1917-December 1918, *passim*.

¹³⁰ James Walvin, *Victorian Values*, London, 1987, p. 96. Also see Prochaska, *Voluntary Impulse*, p. 60.

immediately the war began in June 1914.¹³¹ By giving to charity, and being seen to do so, the League was attempting to establish its respectability and consolidate its public status.

Individual clubs had a long tradition of donating money to local charities. As well as collections at League and cup matches, most directorates responded to formal appeals by donating small sums of money. As Korr has noted of West Ham, clubs reliant on the support of specific communities 'did not want to be accused of being oblivious to the needs of the poor and infirm', especially when the popular perception was that all clubs were making large profits.¹³² The club allocated the gate receipts from practice matches to local hospitals and other charities and even organised special benefit matches, such as that against Tottenham Hotspur and attended by the Duke and Duchess of York in March 1924, in aid of the Docklands Settlement.¹³³ But West Ham's support of local causes and charities was hardly unique. Indeed every Football League club donated the proceeds of its August practice matches to local charities, and the contributions made were recorded in the minutes of the FA and the League and printed in the press. Some clubs were especially proud of their philanthropic record: Rinder informed his fellow club directors and Management Committee members in 1912 that Aston Villa had 'been responsible for collecting and distributing' over £25,000 for charitable purposes in the previous 25 years. Surely, he believed, this 'was a sufficient refutation of the view that football was no good'.¹³⁴

For the League itself charitable giving assumed a similar significance. The motivations for such action were perfectly illustrated in 1909 when *Athletic News*, supported by president John Bentley, Sutcliffe and others, launched a campaign for the League to establish a systematic scheme for the relief of distressed individuals and groups to coincide with the 'Coming-of-Age' celebrations that year. It was suggested that the allocation of one per cent from each gross gate in the competition would be

¹³¹ Veitch, 'Football, the Nation and the First World War'; Arnold, 'Leeds City', pp. 112-13, 117.

¹³² Korr, *West Ham United*, p. 196.

¹³³ Korr, *West Ham United*, pp. 195-99; Minutes of West Ham United FC, 29 October, 5 November 1923.

¹³⁴ Report of the unveiling of the William McGregor Bed Memorial in *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 29 June 1912. Also see Minutes of Football League, 28 June 1912.

'the best possible means for marking the gratitude of the clubs to the communities which have built them up into powerful organisations'.¹³⁵ Though plans for the scheme subsequently became sidetracked that spring and summer by crises and negotiations involving the FA, the Southern League and the Players' Union, the idea was finally realised during the First World War. From the beginning of the regional competitions in the 1915/16 season, each competing club contributed five per cent of its net gate receipts to the League's National and Charity Fund. Out of this the Management Committee allocated approximately half to national charities and returned to the clubs the remainder to distribute to local charities as they saw fit. The largest donations were made to the Red Cross, which received an ambulance car worth £600 inscribed with the name 'The Football League', while a £250 'Football League' tent was given to the YMCA. In all, over £8,000 was raised by the League for national and local wartime charities: contributions which were, significantly, publicised widely in the press and meticulously detailed in the 1938 Jubilee History.¹³⁶

But charity was not simply a product of the unique circumstances of wartime. The League had displayed its philanthropic credentials before the war when in 1912 it arranged for a bed to be purchased for Birmingham General Hospital as a memorial to the founder, William McGregor, who had died the previous year. The bed was paid for by collections amounting to some £1,253 from its forty member clubs along with the Scottish League. Numerous League and club representatives attended the ceremonial presentation of the cheque at the Grand Hotel in Birmingham, which helped cement the League's status as a public benefactor rather than a private company. J. B. Clarke, the chairman of the hospital board, emphasised the point by suggesting that: 'It must be pleasant for those connected with the League to know that their money was helping the ailing and permanently sick.'¹³⁷ For the most part, the League's charity was focused on public disasters which affected industrial communities. Donations were made to the funds for the sufferers of the colliery disasters in Wales in 1913, Maltby Main in 1923 and Gresford in 1934 and the floods

¹³⁵ *Athletic News*, 11 January 1909.

¹³⁶ See Sutcliffe *et al.*, *Football League*, pp. 88-93; *Athletic News*, 10 January, 6 November 1916.

¹³⁷ Report of the Unveiling of the William McGregor Bed Memorial in *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 29 June 1912.

at Fleetwood in 1927.¹³⁸ Appeals from sporting bodies was less favoured. The Management Committee rejected a request from the British Olympic Association in 1913 because the fund 'did not appeal to them as calling for any action on the part of the League or its clubs'. Ten years later the Committee felt sufficiently responsible to donate 100 guineas to a similar fund for British Olympians and in 1931 encouraged its members to contribute to an appeal by the Playing Fields Association.¹³⁹ But in the main the League's benevolence was targeted at social rather than sporting needs, reflecting its concern to be perceived as a national social institution and not a narrowly focused sporting body.

5. Conclusion

The Football League's relationship with the general public was fundamentally contradictory. On the one hand, it was an intrinsically public organisation, engaging with thousands of spectators, wireless listeners and pools punters on a weekly basis through its vast programme of sporting fixtures. Yet on the other hand, it remained a highly secretive and private body; guarded with the press and outsiders and reluctant to experiment in order to increase revenue for its clubs and itself. It has been shown that League clubs were not as reluctant to innovate by improving the quality of the 'football product' as was previously suggested and that the activities of Chapman at Arsenal were in fact less exceptional than some historians would have us believe.¹⁴⁰ But it can nonetheless hardly be denied that by the Second World War the facilities of grounds, the nature and scope of advertising and other attempts to stimulate spectator demand through broadcasting were rudimentary in comparison with the techniques of mainstream retailers, cinema owners and even other sporting enterprises. While there was clearly a considerable demand for League football, at least in the higher divisions, it is difficult to see how this was significantly affected by the policies of the executive or the clubs, except inasmuch as winning teams (or close matches) generally brought in bigger crowds. Indeed club directors and League officials hardly fitted the model

¹³⁸ Minutes of Football League, 3 November 1913; 10 August 1923; 11 November 1927; Wolverhampton Wanderers FC Programme, 6 October, 3 November 1934.

¹³⁹ Minutes of Football League, 1 October 1913; 26 March 1923; 16 February, 24 April 1931.

¹⁴⁰ See Wagg, *Football World*, pp. 37-39; Walvin, *People's Game*, pp. 137-39.

of the ideal entrepreneur who 'sought to increase the supply, reduce the cost and widen the range of goods and services available to the consumer'.¹⁴¹

The attitude of spectators towards the League and its wider profile amongst those who never visited football grounds remains similarly elusive. As the bulk of the football audience were probably supporters of specific teams rather than neutral spectators, their relationships, loyalties and grievances were invariably with the club and not the League. It is indeed more than likely that many were unaware of the League's existence as an autonomous organisation. But while such considerations warn us against overestimating the public impact of the League, it is equally important to recognise that the organisation's tentacles spread far beyond the football world. The Management Committee, in particular, acted throughout the period as an effective pressure group for its clubs at various levels of government while the clubs themselves were centrally involved in civic life in much the same way as any conventional firm or enterprise.

¹⁴¹ John Benson, *The Rise of Consumer Society in Britain, 1880-1980*, London, 1994, p. 44.

CONCLUSION

A study of any specific organisation necessarily provides only a limited view of the industry of which it is a part and the broader social and economic environment within which it operates. This might be regarded as particularly true of the Football League, which as well as establishing regulations like the retain-and-transfer system with no apparent parallel in industrial life, was perceived as a fundamentally insular and introverted body. What is more, football itself came to be regarded as a separate world in which 'normal' economic and administrative assumptions were inappropriate. In certain respects, the football industry was simply not like other industries: its clubs were intrinsically both partners and competitors; they did not pursue profits above all else; and many were able to survive in the face of the sort of long-term losses and debts which would have meant bankruptcy for any other type of company.¹ We should therefore be wary of extrapolating too much about changes and developments in English sport and recreation, or society in general, from the activities of an organisation which was in many respects peculiar and unique.

That said, it is contended that this thesis provides a number of important insights into the progress of elite, professional sport in England in the first four decades of the twentieth century as well as the broader nexus between sport and society. First of all, much has been made of the parallels between the growth of the League and other sports and entertainments or recreations, like theatre, the music-hall and the cinema. The nature of the labour market, trends towards industrial concentration and the application of new managerial ideas such as advertising and marketing, all seem to reflect a fundamental generic similarity which has been overlooked by academics intent on analysing the development of a distinct 'football world'.² Second, the 'story' of the Football League certainly *reflects* various aspects of social and economic history: issues of regional and national identity, class relations, work and labour, business practice, and the interconnections between the state and private bodies have all been touched upon in the preceding chapters. In this sense, the thesis fits the type

¹ Although Jones, 'Economic Aspects' offers a slightly different perspective.

² See Jones, *Workers at Play*, pp. 41-54, for an analysis of the development of the 'leisure industry' as a whole between the wars.

of 'reflectivist' approach recently identified by Jeff Hill as one of British sports history's outstanding methodological characteristics.³ Yet professional football was not simply a reflection of wider social realities: it was capable of affecting the world around it and making a significant social, cultural and economic impact in its own right. The sheer scale of the Football League's operations before the Second World War certainly ensured that it was able to do so. Thus, while locating the League's history within these broad contextual parameters, the thesis has also been concerned with analysing its complex infrastructure, an area largely neglected up to now by historians.

A number of prominent themes have emerged from this approach. In the first place, it has been stressed that the development of the Football League in the period was not an uncomplicated or unilinear process. References to the 'rise' or 'progress' of the League in the (mainly official) literature are misleading as they tend to skate over the various debates and disagreements which accompanied its expansion. On one level, these arguments were strictly concerned with rational issues of economic control and organisational structure. Should the League extend its boundaries by incorporating more clubs and absorbing rival leagues so as to ensure monopolistic and monopsonistic control over English professional football? Or should it remain one of a number of senior organisations which could, nonetheless, establish oligopolistic power through collusion with its rivals?⁴ Such debates were not peculiar to football. The major railways companies were confronted with similar questions after 1900, even though they faced the further complications of government intervention.⁵ On a more fundamental level, however, the issue of expansion was linked to broader questions of regional and national identity. The Football League was rooted in the north and the midlands of England and developed in its early stages as a parochial organisation, comprising mostly of northern clubs, players and administrators and backed by a sympathetic sporting press based around northern weeklies like the highly

³ Jeffrey Hill, 'British Sports History: A Post-Modern Future', *Journal of Sport History*, 23, 1, 1996, p. 14.

⁴ Vamplew, *Pay Up*, p. 113. A clear explanation of the position sports monopolies from an American perspective, but applicable to the English case, is provided in Charles C. Euchner, *Playing the Field: Why sports teams move and cities fight to keep them*, Baltimore, 1994, pp. 35-37.

⁵ See Cain, 'Railways 1870-1914', pp. 117-21.

influential *Athletic News*. As such, it did not regard itself as a 'national' league, even as its geographical boundaries were pushed back by the election of Woolwich Arsenal and Luton in the 1890s and a coterie of metropolitan and southern clubs during the 1900s. Opposition to the 'national league' idea informed the staunch resistance of officials and member clubs to the periodic proposals of amalgamation with the Southern League and it was only after the First World War, in the context of relative prosperity, good gates and a general mood of optimism, that the national league was finally established under the Football League's aegis through the creation of a new southern-based third division.

Yet this transformation of the League into a body with a genuinely national constituency can be seen as part of a broader 'nationalisation of culture' in Britain, in which the variegated, provincial focus of life in the mid-nineteenth century gradually shifted towards 'a more centralised, homogeneous national society'.⁶ Accompanied and driven by the growth of national transport and communication networks, the League arguably became one of many factors which contributed to a broadening of horizons and the binding together of various local and regional communities into a national state. While few supporters physically travelled with their teams to away matches, most could still follow their progress at grounds located in cities across England and Wales and monitor their changing league position in the press. If Eric Hobsbawm could emphasise the importance before 1914 of professional football as a point of reference or a common culture which bound working-class males together 'irrespective of local and regional differences',⁷ then this was even more true of the inter-war period, when the League's boundaries spread to encompass communities in almost every region and county in England, and a number in Wales. This is not to say, however, that the growth and consolidation of a national Football League ought to be seen as an 'invented tradition' which contributed to the foundation of an English 'national identity'. English football, at League as at international level, was always

⁶ Harris, *Private Lives, Public Spirit*, p. 17.

⁷ Eric Hobsbawm, 'Mass-Producing Traditions: Europe, 1870-1914' in Hobsbawm and Ranger (eds), *Invention of Tradition*, p. 301.

too wrapped up in local and regional loyalties to advance perceptions of the nation itself.⁸

Indeed the League's regional identity, and what might be called its 'northernness', remained one of its defining characteristics for the whole of this period. This brings us into a territory which historians have only just begun to explore. The close relationship between sport and a whole range of national, regional and local identities is now generally accepted, but these identities have tended to be associated with a particular sports team or the individual sportsmen and sportswomen themselves.⁹ It certainly appears less evident that a regional identity could be invested in, or constructed around, a sporting organisation, especially one as nebulous as the Football League often seems to have been. It could indeed be argued that what the League really represented was a collection of competing local identities derived from the interconnections of its member clubs rather than a single identity of its own. There is, moreover, the problem of defining and separating 'northernness' from other sub-forms of loyalty and identification, built in the League's case particularly around the north-west and Lancashire. As Hill and Williams concluded in the introduction to their study of *Sport and Identity in the North of England*: 'the North and Northernness have had very many meanings. The North is an imagined territory with no fixed boundaries and the range of qualities which have been seen as characteristic of Northernness are so diverse as to defy neat definition.'¹⁰

Despite these reservations, however, there is little doubt that the Football League was both objectively and subjectively a northern organisation. The decision to locate its permanent offices in Preston from 1902 was partly a matter of logistics, given that the new secretary Tom Charnley was based in the town, but it also reflected and reinforced the League's emergent identity as a parochial organisation, fiercely independent of the governing body whose headquarters remained in the capital. Likewise, the dominance of northern representatives on the Management Committee,

⁸ See Hugh Cunningham, 'Leisure and Culture' in F. M. L. Thompson (ed.), *The Cambridge Social History of Britain, 1750-1950, Volume 2: People and their Environment*, Cambridge, 1990, p. 337; Holt, *Sport and the British*, p. 273.

⁹ See Holt, *Sport and the British*, pp. 159-79.

¹⁰ Jeff Hill and Jack Williams, 'Introduction' in Hill and Williams (ed.), *Sport and Identity*, p. 11.

especially in the inter-war period, was both a highly significant symbol and a tangible means of ensuring the hegemony of the provincial north over the metropolitan south at a time when Arsenal's ascendancy was challenging northern dominance on the field of play. From Bentley and Lewis through to McKenna and Cuff, with the ubiquitous figure of Sutcliffe straddling the entire period, the League's senior administration was essentially a northern clique, aided by a small supporting cast of officials from midlands clubs. The 'northernness' of the League also shone through clearly in its relationship with southern organisations like the FA. The tensions and antagonism between the two bodies up until 1939 were unquestionably underpinned by north-south rivalries which, as Mason has shown, had their origins in the struggle to legalise professionalism in 1885.¹¹ But the League's attitude towards the parent body also drew on a range of wider social resentments and political grievances. The perceived indifference and neglect of the north by central government had a long history, which was only partially modified by the enhancement of its national significance in the course of the industrial revolution.¹² While the FA had rarely shown indifference towards the League and its largely northern membership, there was nevertheless a powerful feeling that the north had been marginalised in Council meetings and the League denied the consideration which such a powerful organisation deserved. In this respect, the League's attitude towards the FA fitted into a broader northern self-image as a people 'whose misfortune it was to be governed by the aristocratic, agrarian South where so much was perceived to depend on public school and family connections'.¹³ Between the wars, therefore, the League struggled to reconcile its parochial identity with its national constituency in an effort to represent both the north and the nation.

The Football League was a very different type of organisation in 1939 than it had been in 1900. The changes in its duties and responsibilities completely transformed the nature of the organisation itself. In the first decade or so of the League's existence, it was little more than a representative body of members charged with organising a sporting competition. Only at annual and special meetings, and gatherings of the

¹¹ Mason, 'Football, Sport of the North?', pp. 44-45.

¹² Jewell, *North-South Divide*, pp. 135-36, 208-10.

¹³ Holt, 'Heroes of the North', p. 138.

Management Committee, did the League have real meaning as a tangible organisation. For many clubs, players and spectators it had an almost abstract existence as a entity which bound them together for a common purpose. Even in the inter-war period, few ever visited the offices at Preston: their understanding of the Football League was gained through the fixture list, the signing-on form and the circular letter. But the League had nevertheless become by this time a powerful bureaucracy with a power-base independent of its constituent clubs. Few aspects of club activity lay outside its ambit and, while there were periodic movements by the leading clubs reaffirming their status as separate enterprises, the overall authority of the Management Committee was rarely questioned. It is telling that previous accounts have almost entirely ignored the growth of the Football League as a central regulatory and administering body - far more important to its professional membership than the FA - and have consequently underplayed its significance in the broader development of the professional game. Reactionary and remote as it may have been from its employees and its audience, Wagg's description of the League in the 1920s as 'a moribund organisation' whose 'significance... as a bureaucracy' had dwindled, is simply inaccurate.¹⁴

The League's bureaucratic expansion is connected to a further theme centred around the phenomenon of professionalisation. There are obvious conceptual difficulties in perceiving the football player as a 'professional' in the sense that doctors, lawyers and even some actors were by the twentieth century. Footballers did not have the type of job security or long-term career structure enjoyed by many professionals; players themselves were not able to control entry into the profession; and other fringe benefits like pensions were slow to develop. Football was a job rather than a profession and in most aspects of his employment the player remained associated with the wage-earner and not the salaried professional man. Despite this, it is evident that the increased bureaucratic control of the League regularised the working conditions of football employees and standardised the relations between player and club. By the 1930s a player who moved from one club to another was in certain respects only changing 'branch' within a national company structure. Moreover, the structure of the League professionalised the game by marginalising the amateur and the part-time or semi-

¹⁴ Wagg, *Football World*, p. 30.

professional player at the highest level. Although a paucity of data makes it difficult to be precise about the changing number of amateur and part-time in relation to full-time players in the League, the available evidence indicates that by 1939 players who had other jobs were exceptional. One newspaper correspondent noted in 1928 that the strict application of training regulations, together with the mounting intensity of mid-week matches, replays and re-arranged games during the second half of the season had made it virtually impossible for most players to have other occupations.¹⁵ This also had fundamental implications for the capacity of League and club employers to control the players, as it inevitably increased the latter's dependence on football as an occupation. In short, the structure of the League and its competition provided the framework for the elevation of the professional footballer and contributed to the development of the close association between professional and elite football in England.

More significantly still, the Football League was clearly implicated in the growth of football's popularity and its rise to the status of the 'national' winter game. Most of those major landmarks in the game's pre-Second World War history which have been recorded by historians - from the record attendances to the expanding transfer fees - took place within the structure of the League. Even those great events which subsequently became mythologised in popular and sporting history - such as the 1923 White Horse Cup Final and the success of Scotland's 'Wembley Wizards' in 1928 - involved League clubs and players. In addition, the transformation of the game from a negative to a positive social phenomenon in the inter-war years, so that 'it was no longer... out of favour with "public opinion" and seemed if anything to stand for much that was good in society' was in reality a transformation in attitudes towards League football and the working-class culture which surrounded it.¹⁶ But there is an evident paradox here: the unquestioned national popularity of football by 1939 was in large part achieved through the activities of a conservative organisation which eschewed attempts both to popularise and to nationalise the game. The League and its decision-makers were extremely reluctant to exploit the opportunities provided by the rise of cinema and radio or to promote their product through advertising or other intrinsic

¹⁵ *Topical Times*, 14 April 1928.

¹⁶ Fishwick, *English Football*, pp. 146-47.

methods. The steps that were taken tended to emanate from the clubs themselves, who experimented with improved ground facilities, floodlit matches, shirt numbering and other innovations. And, as we have seen, the League rarely ventured from its parochial viewpoint and its narrow range of responsibilities, which precluded any involvement in spreading and popularising the game itself, both at home and abroad. This, it was felt, was the job of the governing body not of a self-contained organisation: the League's role was to look after the League, not the game of football.

As Walvin has noted, football was in a remarkably healthy and buoyant state immediately prior to the Second World War. The popular support for the game was visible in the 'packed stadiums, [with] armies of satisfied listeners huddled close to their radio sets, with millions ticking their football pools weekly and with the press replete with footballing interest'.¹⁷ At a lower level, the growth in players and clubs during this part of the twentieth century was enormous. The number of registered players rose from 750,000 before the First World War to a million by the late 1930s, while clubs increased 12,000 in 1910 to some 35,000 in 1937.¹⁸ The Football League's contribution to these achievements seems to have been largely unwitting. It provided the context and the framework for football's mounting popularity but was rarely consciously involved in the process. In actual fact, its policies towards the outside world and football in general were usually defensive and reactive rather than proactive.

Yet firms conclusions on the role of the Football League in the development of professional football's infrastructure before the Second World War must await further work. Although Hill has urged historians studying sport to adopt a "from below" approach to their subjects, it is evident that our knowledge of the internal politics of English sport - the institutions and the leaders who established and consolidated the infrastructures - is seriously lacking. While football was essentially built around clubs and local communities, it also developed within regional, national and international networks which significantly affected, and at certain times determined, the processes of change and continuity at the local level. Furthermore, work of this type does not

¹⁷ Walvin, *People's Game*, p. 142.

¹⁸ Fishwick, *English Football*, p. 1.

need to reject the importance of identities, traditions and the experiences of the sporting public. Organisations like the Football League may have been for the most part remote and uninterested in the concerns of its audience, but they were not always neutral bureaucracies. Like sports teams and star players, sporting organisations were invested with a range of different and often competing identities, from which they attempted to define themselves and interact with other groups and individuals.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1
Management Committee members, 1900-39

Name	Positions	Club	Occupation	Occupational Class
William McGregor	Chairman 1888-92 President 1892-94 Life Member 1895-1911	Aston Villa	Draper	2A
John Bentley	Committee 1888-93 Vice-President 1893-94 President 1894-1910 Committee 1910-12 Life Member 1912-18	Bolton Wanderers and Manchester United	Journalist	1A
John Lewis	Committee 1894-95 and 1900-01 Vice-President 1901-26	Blackburn Rovers	Carriage Builder	2A
David Haigh	Vice-President 1895-1901	Sheffield United	Not Known	n/a
William Bellamy	Committee 1896-1900	Grimsby Town	Partner in Mineral Water Business	2A
Tom Sidney	Vice-President 1897-1905	Wolverhampton Wanderers	Corporation Official	2B
Harry Radford	Committee 1898-1905 Vice-President 1905-08	Nottingham Forest	Corporation Official	2B
Charles Sutcliffe	Committee 1898-1902 and 1903-27 Vice-President 1927-36 President 1936-39 Life Member 1938-39	Burnley and Oldham Athletic	Solicitor	1A
Walter Hart	Committee 1899-1903	Small Heath	Metal Ware Manufacturer	2A
George Leavey	Committee 1901-04	Woolwich Arsenal	Men's Outfitter	2A
John McKenna	Committee 1902-08 Vice-President 1908-10 President 1910-36 Life Member 1923-36	Liverpool	Vaccination Officer	2B
James Baxter	Committee 1904-19	Everton	Doctor	1A
Henry Keys	Committee 1905-10 Vice-President 1910-29	West Bromwich Albion	Bicycle Agent	2A
John Cameron	Committee 1907-16	Newcastle United and Leeds City	Clothing Trader and Publican	2A
Arthur Dickinson	Committee 1909-29 Vice-President 1929-30	Sheffield Wednesday	Cutlery Salesman	2B
Tom Harris	Committee 1909-17	Notts County	Football Club Secretary	2B
Tom Houghton	Committee 1912-13	Preston North End	Brewery Agent	2A
William Hall	Committee 1913-27	Arsenal	Metal Merchant	2A
John Peel Oliver	Committee 1917-28	Newcastle United	Wine Spirit Merchant	2A
Fred Rinder	Committee 1917-30 Vice-President 1930-38 Life Member 1938	Aston Villa and Bristol Rovers	Corporation Surveyor	2B
Tom Barcroft	Committee 1919-25 and 1927-43	Blackpool	Retired Banker and Football Club Secretary	2B
William Cuff	Committee 1925-36 Vice-President 1936-39 President 1939-49	Everton	Solicitor	1A

Morton Cadman	Committee 1927-39 Vice-President 1939-41	Tottenham Hotspur	Rate Collector	2B
Phil Bach	Committee 1929-37	Middlesbrough	Ex-Professional Footballer and Licensed Victualler	2A
William Bassett	Committee 1930-37	West Bromwich Albion	Ex-Professional Footballer and Cinema Director	2A
Amos Brook Hirst	Committee 1931-39 Vice-President 1939-41	Huddersfield Town	Solicitor	1A
John Edwards	Committee 1936-40	Arsenal	Solicitor	1A
Walter Tempest	Committee 1939-41	Blackburn Rovers	Managing Director	2B
Arthur Oakley	Committee 1937-41	Wolverhampton Wanderers	Coal Merchant	2A
George Rutherford	Committee 1938-50	Newcastle United	Coal Mine Owner	2A
Bill Cearns	Committee 1939-50	West Ham United	Building Contractor/ Greyhound Stadium Director	2A

Occupational Classes

- 1A Higher Professional
- 1B Lower Professional
- 2A Employers and Proprietors
- 2B Managers and Administrators
- 3 Clerical Workers
- 4 Foreman, Inspectors and Supervisors
- 5 Skilled Manual Workers
- 6 Semi-Skilled Manual Workers
- 7 Unskilled Manual Workers

Sources: Athletic News; All Sports Weekly; Birmingham Weekly Post; Birmingham Mail; Blackpool Gazette; Burnley Express; Huddersfield Weekly Examiner; The Lancashire Review; Liverpool Daily Post; Liverpool Echo; The Liverpoolian; Midland Chronicle and Free Press; Wolverhampton Express and Star; Kelly's Directory of Lancashire; Barrett's Directory of Preston and Flyde Districts; Barrett's Directory of Burnley and District; Gore's Liverpool Directory; Ward's Directory of Newcastle-on-Tyne; Wright's Directory of Nottingham; Kelly's Directory of Nottinghamshire; Post Office London Directory; Kelly's Directory of Staffordshire; Huddersfield County Borough Directory; FA, Register of Directors and Managers; Sutcliffe and Hargreaves, History of the Lancashire FA; Pickford and Gibson (eds.), Association Football, vol. 3; Inglis, League Football, pp. 387-95.

APPENDIX 2

A. Football and Southern League Clubs Reaching the FA Cup Quarter-Final Stage, 1894-1919

Year	Football League	Southern League
1895	8	0
1896	8	0
1897	8	0
1898	6	1
1899	7	1
1900	6	2
1901	6	2
1902	6	2
1903	6	2
1904	7	1
1905	6	2
1906	7	1
1907	7	1
1908	7	1
1909	8	0
1910	5	3
1911	6	2
1912	7	1
1913	8	0
1914	7	1
1915	8	0
1920	8	0

Source: Calculated from data in Mallory (ed.), *League Tables*.

B. Football League and Southern League Players Selected for England
International Teams, 1894/95-1919/20

Year	Caps Awarded	Football League	Southern League
1894/95	33	18	0
1895/96	33	15	0
1896/97	33	26	0
1897/98	33	23	0
1898/99	33	27	2
1899/1900	33	16	8
1900/01	33	21	4
1901/02	33	30	1
1902/03	33	23	9
1903/04	33	29	3
1904/05	33	26	5
1905/06	33	22	4
1906/07	33	32	1
1907/08	77	67	10
1908/09	66	62	2
1909/10	33	31	2
1910/11	33	27	6
1911/12	33	32	1
1912/13	33	31	2
1913/14	33	31	1
1919/20	33	30	1

Source: Calculated from data in *Rothman's Football Yearbook, 1989/90.*

APPENDIX 3

Proposed Scheme for a Third Division, April 1909

1. That a Third Division of the Football League be formed, such Division to consist of 20 clubs.
2. That the Southern League shall nominate 18 clubs to form part of such Third Division.
3. That the entrance fee to the Third Division shall be £5-5-0; annual subscription, £5-5-0; and the fee on promotion from Division 3 to Division 2, £100. Two clubs shall be promoted and two retire, but to be eligible for re-election.
4. That all clubs joining the Football League shall pay transfer fees in the usual way except that where immediate payment is impossible the Management Committee shall have power to order a club to pay to the League to a special fund to the credit of such club a sum not exceeding 10 % of its gross gates until the fund shall be sufficient to meet the club's transfer liabilities. The Management Committee shall also have power to order the payment or allocation of any part of a transfer fee received for a player to the special transfer club of the club entitled to receive the same. No transfer fees for players who have been 5 years with their present club.
5. The Third Division to have *one* representative on the Management Committee.
6. The Third Division to be allowed 10 votes at General Meetings for the first season, the Southern League to settle which of the clubs shall be entitled to vote, but thereafter the top 10 clubs in the Third Division shall have the voting power. In ascertaining the top 10 clubs, the bottom two in the Second Division shall be deemed to have exchanged places with the top two in the Third.
7. No Southern League club shall be eligible for election to the Second Division of the Football League at the next AGM of the Football League.

Source: Football League Circular to Clubs, April 1909.

APPENDIX 4

Proposed Scheme for a Third Division, May 1920

That, subject to the consent of the Football Association, a Third Division of the League be formed.

That the clubs at present forming the First Division of the Southern Football League shall comprise the Third Division for the season 1920/21.

The top club at the end of the season's Competition shall be promoted to the Second Division and the bottom club in the Second Division relegated to the Third.

The Management Committee shall consider the formation of a Northern Section of the Third Division for the season 1921/22 with similar rights of promotion and, if sufficient clubs of suitable playing and financial strength are available, a Special General Meeting of the League shall be held in February, 1921, to elect the clubs.

The following special rules shall apply to the Third Division when fully constituted and so far as is applicable until fully constituted, and the clubs comprising the same shall be known as Associate Members.

The League shall admit to Associate Membership not more than 44 clubs upon the terms and subject as follows:

1. The entrance fee shall be £100 for each club.
2. The annual subscription shall be £10 10s., payable on or before the first day of June in each year.
3. All new clubs shall pay the entrance fee and first annual subscription on election.
4. The clubs shall have no rights or votes as members and shall not be called upon to pay transfer fees for players except as hereinafter mentioned.
5. The 44 clubs or such lesser numbers as shall be elected to Associate Membership shall constitute and be known as the Third Division and shall, if and when necessary, be divided into two sections, North and South, for Competition purposes.
6. The clubs shall be allocated to the respective sections by the Management Committee of the Football League.
7. A Competition shall be conducted for each section on the same lines as to the Competitions in the League and the Championship club in each section ascertained in the same manner as the Championship club in the First Division of the League. At the end of each season the Championship clubs shall be promoted to the Second Division, taking the places vacated by the bottom two clubs. Until fully constituted the Championship club of the Third Division shall take the place of the bottom club of the Second Division.
8. On earning promotion the club or clubs shall become Members of the Football League, enjoying all the privileges of membership and shall become responsible for the obligations of members under the General Rules and shall, in particular,

- a) Pay a further entrance fee of £200, thus making a total entrance fee of £300 in accordance with the General Rule 1, two-thirds of such sum of £200 being placed to a suspense account returnable in accordance with such rules.
 - b) Discharge the obligations of transfer rights for players registered and held by the members of the League or the Management Committee.
 - c) Be subject to the payment of percentage of gate in lieu of annual subscription.
9. All players hitherto registered by a member of the First or Second Division or held by the Management Committee on behalf of a former club in membership with the League shall be regarded as joint players until the joint holding shall be ended by transfer or the cancellation on the part of one of the clubs; players registered by Associate Members and not previously registered by a member shall be the League player of the club registering him, and the Associate Member shall have all the rights and privileges of members under Rule 6 of the General Rules.
10. At the end of each season's Competition the bottom two clubs in the Second Division who by virtue of such position cease to be members of the Football League shall become automatically Associate Members. Until the Northern Section of the Third Division is formed this rule shall only apply to the bottom club in the Second Division.
11. At the end of each season the bottom two clubs in each section of the Third Division as shall be in operation shall retire from Associate Membership but be eligible for re-election. Clubs dropping into the Third Division and subsequently gaining promotion to the Second Division shall pay a promotion fee of £20, clubs re-elected to the Third Division shall pay an entrance fee of £5 5s.
12. New clubs may apply for Associate Membership. The application to be made in accordance with the General Rules.
13. The Management Committee of the League shall manage the affairs and Competition of such Third Division and shall make any necessary rearrangements of clubs to constitute the two sections after the election of the new clubs.
14. The Management Committee shall hold the transfer rights of all players of clubs ceasing Associate Membership in accordance with General Rule 29, except in the case of joint registration when the registration of the club retiring shall be cancelled.

Source: Sutcliffe et al., Football League, pp. 95-96.

APPENDIX 5

Oldham Athletic FC Election Circular to Clubs, April 1907

To the Committee of Directors of the

.....Club.

GENTLEMEN,

It is the intention of this Club to again apply, at the forthcoming Annual Meeting, for admission to the Second Division of the League, and on behalf of the Directors and Members we desire to lay before you the reasons why we consider our admittance will be beneficial not only to the League, but to Association Football, its followers and supporters generally; with the object of gaining your assistance and support at the Annual Meeting of the League.

Population of the Town and District

In the first place, Oldham has a population of 150,000 in the Municipal, and over 200,000 in the Parliamentary Borough. Within five miles of the centre of town there is a population of 650,000, and within ten miles of the same centre the population is over Two-and-a-half-Millions.

Accessibility and Travelling Facilities

The town is easily accessible to all the Clubs in the Second Division of the League, and its easy access from Manchester, into which all railways run, makes it a most desirable acquisition to the League. Between Manchester and Oldham there is a twenty-minutes' train service, and the Manchester Corporation Electric Cars run from the centre of that city through to Oldham and the Ground for a 5d. fare.

In addition to this, the various Railway Companies run a frequent service of trains into the town direct from Huddersfield and Leeds (L. & N. W.), Stockport (L. & N. W.), Guide Bridge (G. C.), and Rochdale (L. & Y.).

Further, the whole of the district for a radius of twelve miles is a network of electric systems, it being not only possible but exceedingly convenient to get from any town in that area into Oldham by electric car at nominal fares.

Oldham as a Sporting Centre

The town is situate in the very centre of that most densely-populated district known as South-East Lancashire, which has a national reputation as a sporting centre. It has held a foremost position in Rugby football for a large number of years, and the thousands who follow the Rugby club week by week testifies to the popularity of football in the district.

Progress of the Association Game

Whilst it is not the intention of this Club to enter into improper competition with the Rugby Club, there has of late years been a noticeable inclination on the part of football enthusiasts to follow the Association game (this inclination has been more noticeable during the present season than in any

one previously), and since the formation of the "Oldham Athletic" that tendency has been fostered until it has now grown into a determined demand for a better-class Association football. When this Club was formed there was no Association club in the district, whilst now at the present moment there are ninety-eight clubs (affiliated to various Leagues) playing Association football, against six playing Rugby. In addition, the whole of the schools in the district are playing the Association code, all having changed from Rugby.

Record of the "Oldham Athletic"

The Oldham Athletic Association Football Club was established nine years ago. It first became associated with the Manchester Alliance, and afterwards the Manchester League, and, during the connection with the latter, won the Manchester Junior Cup.

The next mark of progress was in joining the Lancashire Combination B Division (Season 1904/05), in which it won its way to the First Division in one season. During the same season the Club also won the Ashton Charity Cup, after being runners-up the previous year. This year we are running strongly for the Championship of the First Division...

In regard to gates, we have been able to obtain 8,000 spectators regularly, and with the contemplated improvement in the team, a corresponding increased support is reasonably expected. Below will be found the record of our principal gates for the present season:-

	Attendance	Gate
Liverpool (English Cup Tie)	21,538	£670-12-9
Kidderminster H. (English Cup Tie)	13,102	£245-8-8
Bolton Wanderers Res. (Comb. Match)	12,405*	
Liverpool Reserves (Comb. Match)	10,961*	
Bury Reserves (Comb. Match)	9,817*	
Accrington Stanley (Comb. Match)	8,397*	

* Excluding Members, who are not checked by turnstiles.

We also give you our chief results, and would remind you that in next season's Cup Competition we have been exempted to the Last Qualifying Round - an honour we believe due to our success in the Cup Competition this season, which you will find set out herein.

The Club a Limited Company

The Club has been formed into a Limited Liability Company, with the object of placing it on an approved financial basis, with a capital of £2,000.

The Membership of 1,000, spread over all parts of the district, proves the popularity of the Club to be both genuine and widespread, and leaves no possible room for doubt, whilst the Directors have promises of financial assistance to an unlimited extent on gaining admission to the League.

The Ground

The Ground is suitable and convenient, and capable of holding at least 50,000 spectators, which, with the addition of further stand accommodation, will make an ideal ground. It is situate within a 1d. car ride of the centre of the town, or of Central, Werneth, or Royton (L. & Y.), and Clegg Street (L. & N. W. and G. C.) Stations.

Trusting to receive your support and vote at the forthcoming meeting,

We are, Gentlemen,
Yours faithfully,
JOHN GRIME, Chairman.
WILLIAM HEATH, Vice-Chairman.
EGBERT L. THOMPSON, Secretary.
D. G. ASHWORTH, Manager.

ENGLISH CUP RECORD
1906/07
OLDHAM ATHLETIC v.

	For	Against	Ground
Hyde	5	0	Oldham
Newton Heath	4	1	Oldham
Buxton	3	1	Buxton
Atherton	1	1	Atherton
Atherton (Replay)	4	1	Oldham
Southbank (Intermediate Round)	9	1	Oldham
Kidderminster H. (1st. Round)	5	0	Oldham
Liverpool (2nd. Round)	0	1	Oldham
TOTAL	31	6	

APPENDIX 6
RAILWAY FACILITIES OF FOOTBALL LEAGUE CLUBS, 1909/10 AND
1919/20

Club	1909/10 Stations	Companies	1919/20 Stations	Companies
(Woolwich) Arsenal	Plumstead		Gillespie Road Drayton Park Finsbury Park	Tube {GNR {Piccadilly Tube
Aston Villa	Witton		Birmingham Witton Aston	
Barnsley	Barnsley		Barnsley Barnsley	Court House Midland GCR L&YR
Birmingham	Birmingham		Birmingham (New Street) Birmingham (Snow Hill)	L&NWR Midland GWR
Blackburn Rovers	Blackburn Lower Darwen		Blackburn Lower Darwen Mill Hill	
Blackpool	Central		Central Waterloo	
Bolton Wanderers	Bolton	L&YR L&NW	Trinity Street Great Moor Street	L&YR L&NWR
Bradford City	Bradford	Midland NER L&YR GNR	Bradford	Midland NER L&YR GNR GCR L&NWR
Bradford (PA)	Bradford Bradford	Midland NER GNR L&YR GCR	Bradford	Midland NER GNR L&YR GCR L&NWR
Bristol City	Bristol		Bristol	GWR Midland
Burnley	Bank Top Manchester Road		Bank Top Manchester Road	
Bury	Knowsley Road Bolton Street		Knowsley Road Bolton Street	
Chelsea	Chelsea	West London	Walham Green	District Tube

	Walham Green	Extension District Tube		
Clapton Orient	Homerton Clapton	GER	Homerton Clapton	NLR GER
Coventry City	—	—	Coventry	L&NWR
Derby County	Derby	Midland GNR	Derby	Midland GNR
Everton	Walton Kirkdale	L&NWR L&YR	All Stations in Liverpool	
Fulham	Putney Bridge Hammersmith	District Railway District Railway or Tube	Putney Bridge Hammersmith	District Railway District Railway or Tube
Gainsborough Trinity	Gainsborough	GCR GNR GER	—	—
Glossop	Glossop	GCR	—	—
Grimsby Town	New Clee		New Clee	
Huddersfield Town	—	—	Huddersfield (one mile)	
Leeds City	All Stations in Leeds		Leeds	NER L&NWR Midland GNR L&YR
Leicester Fosse (City)	Leicester	Midland L&NW GCR GNR	Leicester	Midland GCR GNR
Lincoln City	Lincoln	GNR GCR Midland GNR GER	Lincoln	GNR GCR Midland
Liverpool	All Stations in Liverpool		All Stations in Liverpool	
Manchester City	Hyde Road Ardwick Manchester		All Stations in Manchester	
Manchester United	All Stations in Manchester		All Stations in Manchester	
Middlesborough	Middlesborough		Middlesborough	
Newcastle United	Central		Central	
Notts County		Midland GNR GCR		Midland GNR GCR
Nottingham Forest		GNR GCR	Victoria	GCR GNR

		Midland	Nottingham	Midland
Oldham Athletic	Werneth Clegg Street	L&YR L&NWR	Werneth Clegg Street	L&YR L&NWR GCR
Preston North End	Central Deepdale		Central	
Rotherham County	—	—	Rotherham	Midland GCR
Sheffield United	Sheffield	Midland GCR	Sheffield	Midland GCR GNR
Sheffield Wednesday	Sheffield	Midland GCR	Sheffield	Midland GCR
South Shields	—	—	South Shields	
Stockport County	Stockport Teviot Dale, Cheadle Heath	L&NWR Midland	Edgeley Teviot Dale	L&NWR Cheshire Lines Midland
Stoke	—	—	Stoke	
Sunderland	Sunderland Monkwearmouth		Sunderland Monkwearmouth	
Tottenham Hotspur	White Hart Lane	GER	White Hart Lane	GER
West Bromwich Albion	Smethwick Handsworth or West Bromwich	L&NWR GWR	Smethwick Handsworth or West Bromwich Birmingham	L&NWR GWR GWR Midland L&NWR
West Ham United	—	—	Upton Park Tilbury Section	
Wolverhampton Wanderers	Wolverhampton	L&NWR Midland GWR	Wolverhampton	L&NWR Midland GWR

Source: Football League Handbooks, 1909/10, 1919/20.

GCR - Great Central Railway
 GER - Great Eastern Railway
 GNR - Great Northern Railway
 GWR - Great Western Railway
 L&NWR - London and North Western Railway
 L&YR - Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway
 NER - North Eastern Railway
 NLR - North London Railway

APPENDIX 7

Exit and Entry of Clubs in the Football League, 1900-39

	Club Exiting	Reason for Exiting	Club Entering
1900	Luton Town	Resigned	Stockport County
	Loughborough	Voted Out	Blackpool
1901	Walsall	Voted Out	Bristol City
	New Brighton Tower	Resigned	Doncaster Rovers
1902	—	—	—
1903	Doncaster Rovers	Voted Out	Bradford City
1904	Stockport County	Voted Out	Doncaster Rovers
1905	—	—	League extended by 4 Clubs (Chelsea, Clapton Orient, Leeds City, Stockport County)
1906	—	—	—
1907	Burton United	Voted Out	Fulham
	Burslem Port Vale	Resigned	Oldham Athletic
1908	Lincoln City	Voted Out	Bradford Park Avenue
	Stoke	Resigned	Tottenham Hotspur
1909	Chesterfield	Voted Out	Lincoln City
1910	Grimsby Town	Voted Out	Huddersfield Town
1911	Lincoln City	Voted Out	Grimsby Town
1912	Gainsborough Trinity	Voted Out	Lincoln City
1913	—	—	—
1914	—	—	—
1915	Glossop North End	Voted Out	Stoke
1919	Leeds City	Expelled	Burslem Port Vale
	—	—	League extended by 4 Clubs (Coventry City, West Ham United, Rotherham County, South Shields)
1920	Grimsby Town	Voted Out	Leeds United
	Lincoln City	Voted Out	Cardiff City
			Third Division Southern Section of 22 Clubs added*
1921			Southern Section expanded by 2 Clubs (Aberdare Athletic, Charlton Athletic). Third Division Northern Section of 20 Clubs added*
1922	—	—	—
1923	Stalybridge Celtic	Resigned	Bournemouth & Boscombe Athletic. Northern Section expanded by 2 Clubs (Doncaster Rovers, New Brighton)

1924	-	-	-
1925	-	-	-
1926	-	-	-
1927	Aberdare Athletic	Voted Out	Torquay United
1928	Durham City	Voted Out	Carlisle United
1929	Ashington	Voted Out	York City
1930	Merthyr Town	Voted Out	Thames
1931	Newport County	Voted Out	Mansfield Town
	Nelson	Voted Out	Chester City
1932	Wigan Borough	Resigned	Newport County
1933	Thames	Resigned	Aldershot
1934	-	-	-
1935	-	-	-
1936	-	-	-
1937	-	-	-
1938	Gillingham	Voted Out	Ipswich Town
1939	-	-	-

* Brentford, Brighton & Hove Albion, Bristol Rovers, Crystal Palace, Exeter City, Gillingham, Grimsby Town, Luton Town, Merthyr Town, Millwall, Newport County, Northampton Town, Norwich City, Plymouth Argyle, Portsmouth, Queen's Park Rangers, Reading, Southampton, Southend United, Swansea Town, Swindon Town and Watford.

** Accrington Stanley, Ashington, Barrow, Chesterfield, Crewe Alexandra, Darlington, Durham City, Grimsby Town, Halifax Town, Harlepool United, Lincoln City, Nelson, Rochdale, Southport, Stalybridge Celtic, Stockport City, Tranmere Rovers, Walsall, Wigan Borough and Wrexham.

Source: Sutcliffe et al., Football League, pp. 108-12.

APPENDIX 8
Representation of League Management Committee Members on FA Standing
Committees, 1910/11-1937/38

<u>Committee</u>	<u>1910/ 11</u>	<u>1913/ 14</u>	<u>1919/ 20</u>	<u>1922/ 23</u>	<u>1925/ 26</u>	<u>1928/ 29</u>	<u>1931/ 32</u>	<u>1934/ 35*</u>	<u>1937/ 38</u>
<u>Management Committee Members</u>	3	3	5	5	5	3	7	8	8
<u>Consultative</u>	3	2	5	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	1
<u>Finance</u>	1	0	1	1	1**	1	1	1	1
<u>Emergency</u>	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	n/a
<u>International Selection</u>	2	2	2	2	4	3	4	5	5
<u>Rules Revision</u>	1	1	2	1	2	1	3	1	1
<u>Reinstatement</u>	1	0	0	2	1***	0	1	2	1
<u>Leagues Sanction</u>	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0
<u>Referees</u>	1	1	1	3	2	1	3	3	2
<u>Appeals</u>	2	1	1	1	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
<u>Amateur Cup</u>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<u>Benevolent Fund</u>	0	1	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
<u>Exemption</u>	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	1	0	1	0	1
<u>Minor Football</u>	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	0	0	0	0
<u>Disciplinary</u>	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	1
<u>Total</u>	12	9	13	11	13	8	15	14	13

* Henceforth no Councillor could be represented on more than 2 Committees (with exception of the Emergency Committee)

** Renamed Finance and General Purposes Committee

*** Renamed Permit Committee

Source: FA Minute Books.

APPENDIX 9
SMALL HEATH FC PLAYERS' AGREEMENT, 1896

An agreement made this Fifth day of May 1896 between THE SMALL HEATH FOOTBALL CLUB LIMITED, whose Registered Office is at Small Heath, in the City of Birmingham (hereinafter called the said Club), of the one part, and
Edwin Joseph Fountain
of 1 Highgate Terrace, Darwin St., Birmingham
(hereinafter called the said player) of the other part.

Now it is hereby agreed by and between the said parties hereto as follows:

1. The said Club shall engage the said player, and the said player shall serve the said Club on the terms and in manner hereinafter mentioned.
2. The engagement shall continue from September 1st. 1896 until April 30th. next.
3. The said Club shall pay the said player the weekly sum of £1 (and if played with First Team to be paid £1 10s. per week when playing) and the same shall be paid on Tuesday of each week during the term of engagement.
4. The said player shall play whenever and wherever required so to do by the said Club; he shall at all times render a true and faithful service, and use his best endeavours to win the matches in which he plays, and maintain the reputation of the Club, and shall be on the field, or at the place named for meeting by the said club, promptly at the time named by the said Club (except in case of sudden or serious personal illness); and when selected as reserve man shall be at the place named by the said Club, with all the necessary outfit for playing.
5. The said player shall behave himself on the field in a proper and seemly manner, and shall not use any offensive or indecent language; and also shall at all times during this engagement conduct himself in a proper and seemly manner.
6. The said player shall at all times keep himself sober, fit, well and in a proper condition to play such football as is played by the said Club.
7. The said player shall train whenever and wherever required so to do by the said Club, under the supervision of the trainer, and shall obey him in every particular.
8. The said player shall not play football for any other club in any contest or match whatsoever, without having first obtained the consent of the said Club in writing.
9. The said player shall always obey the captain of the team in which he is playing, and shall be obedient to his orders and commands.
10. The said player shall not bet or wager upon the result of any game, or match, in which he is playing, nor in any way whatsoever, either directly or indirectly, be concerned in betting or wagering upon football matches.

11. If the said player shall not observe, or shall commit a breach of any of the conditions and stipulations hereinbefore set forth and contained, then the said Club may summarily dismiss the said player upon paying him such proportion of the wages as is due to him up to the time of such breach or non-observance; or may, at the option of the said Club, suspend the said player for the whole or part of his engagement; and the said player shall not be entitled to any wages or payment during such suspension.

Source: PFA, File 2.

APPENDIX 10
MILLWALL FC PLAYERS' AGREEMENT, 1933

AN AGREEMENT made the Third day of May 1933 between Angus Gillies of New Cross in the COUNTY OF LONDON, the Secretary of and acting pursuant to Resolution and Authority for and on behalf of the MILLWALL FOOTBALL CLUB of New Cross (hereinafter referred to as the Club) of the one part and Leonard Graham of Leyton in the County of London, Professional Football Player, (hereinafter referred to as the Player) of the other part WHEREBY it is agreed as follows:

1. The Player hereby agrees to play in an efficient manner and to the best of his ability for the Club.
2. The Player shall attend the Club's ground for the purposes of or in connection with his training as a Player pursuant to the instructions of the Secretary, Manager, or Trainer of the Club, or of such other person, or persons, as the Club may appoint. (This provision shall not apply if the player is engaged by the Club at a weekly wage of less than One Pound, or at a wage per match).
3. The Player shall do everything necessary to get and keep himself in the best possible condition so as to render the most efficient service to the Club, and will carry out all the training and other instructions of the Club through its representative officials.
4. The Player shall observe and be subject to all Rules, Regulations, and Bye-Laws of the Football Association, and any other Association, League or Combination of which the Club shall be a member. And this Agreement shall be subject to any action which shall be taken by The Football Association under their Rules for the suspension or termination of the Football Season, and if any such suspension or termination shall be decided upon the payment of wages shall likewise be suspended or terminated, as the case may be.
5. The Player shall not engage in any business or live in any place which the Directors (or Committee) of the Club may deem unsuitable.
6. If the Player shall prove palpably inefficient, or shall be guilty of serious misconduct or breach of the disciplinary Rules of the Club, the Club may, on giving 14 days' notice to the said Player, or the Club may, on giving 28 days' notice to the said Player, on any reasonable grounds, terminate this Agreement and dispense with the services of the Player (without prejudice to the Club's right for transfer fees) in pursuance of the Rules of all such Associations, Leagues, and Combinations of which the Club may be a member. Such notice or notices shall be in writing, and shall specify the reason for the same being given, and shall also set forth the rights of appeal to which the Player is entitled under the Rules of the Football Association.

The Rights of Appeal are as follow:

Any League or other Combination of Clubs may, subject to these Rules, make some regulations between their Clubs and Players as they may deem necessary. Where Leagues and Combinations are sanctioned direct by this Association an Appeals Committee shall be appointed by this Association.

Where Leagues and Combinations are sanctioned by County Associations an Appeals Committee shall be appointed by the sanctioning County Associations. Where an agreement between a Club and a Player in any League or other Combination provides for the Club terminating by notice the Player of the Agreement between the Club and Player any reasonable ground the following practice shall prevail. A Player shall have the right to appeal to the Management Committee of the League or Combination and a further right of appeal to the Appeals Committee of that body. A Club on giving notice to a Player to terminate his Agreement must state in the notice the name of the League or Combination to which he may appeal, and must also at the same time give notice to the League or Combination of which the Club is a member. A copy of the notice sent to the Player must at the same time be forwarded to the Secretary of this Association. The Player shall have right the right of appeal to the League or Combination, but such appeal must be made within 7 days of the receipt of the Notice from the Club. The appeal shall be heard by the Management Committee within 10 days of the receipt of the Notice from the Player. If either party is dissatisfied with the decision, there shall be a right of further appeal to the Appeals Committee of the League or Combination, but such appeal must be made within 7 days of the receipt of the decision of the Management Committee, and must be heard by the Appeals Committee within 10 days of the receipt of the Notice of Appeal. The League or Combination shall report to this Association when the matter is finally determined, and the Agreement and Registration shall be cancelled by this Association where necessary. Agreements between Clubs and Players shall contain a clause showing the provision made for dealing with such disputes and for the cancelling of the Agreements and Registrations by this Association. Clubs not belonging to any League or Combination before referred to may, upon obtaining the approval of this Association, make similar regulations. Such regulations to provide a right of appeal by either party to the County Association, or to this Association.

7. This Agreement and the terms and conditions thereof shall be as to its suspension and termination subject to the Rules of the The Football Association and to any action which may be taken by the Council of The Football Association or any deputed Committee, and in any proceedings by the Player against the Club it shall be a sufficient and complete defence and answer by and on the part of the Club that such suspension or termination hereof is due to the action of The Football Association, or any Sub-Committee thereof to whom the power may be delegated.

8. In consideration of the observance by the said player of the terms, provisions and conditions of this Agreement, the said Angus Gillies on behalf of the Club hereby agrees that the said Club shall pay to the said Player the sum of £ Six per week during the close season and £ Seven per week during the playing season.

9. This Agreement (subject to the Rules of the Football Association) shall cease and determine on 5th. May 1934 unless the same shall have been previously determined in accordance with the provisions hereinbefore set forth.

One pound per week extra when playing in the First Team.

Source: PFA, File 35.

Appendix 11
Millwall FC Rules to Players, 1933

Players, except those in employment, are requested to attend at the Ground (except where otherwise advised) each morning not later than 10 o'clock, and in the afternoon no later than 2.30 o'clock for training purposes, and to obtain the Manager's or Trainer's permission before leaving.

All players to sign the Training Book each morning and afternoon (when requested to attend) with the correct time of their arrival.

No player during his engagement with this club - close and playing season - shall be allowed to ride on or drive a motor cycle and/ or side car.

No player shall be permitted to reside on, or be engaged in any capacity on Licensed Premises.

Players in employment are likewise requested to attend the ground on Tuesday and Thursday Evenings, from 5 to 8 p.m. for training, or such evenings as arranged with the Trainers.

ALL players must be indoors at their home or lodgings by 10 p.m. on the evening preceding match days. Players on the sick or injured list must produce a Doctor's Certificate, and be indoors (home or lodgings) not later than 8 p.m.

Illness as an excuse for non-attendance to the provisions of this notice will not be accepted unless a Doctor's Certificate is produced.

Week-end leave not allowed except under very special circumstances.

All players will be supplied with their football outfit, and will be held responsible for the loss of same.

All such outfits to be returned to the Trainer when requested.

Any case of infectious disease to be notified at once.

Anyone not complying with the above rules will be dealt with by the Directors

NOTE. The above rules will be strictly enforced.

By order of the Directors,

R. HUNTER.

Source: PFA, File 35.

APPENDIX 12
Gain and loss on Football League Pooling Arrangements, 1917/18- 1938/39

<i>Sheffield United</i>					<i>Oldham Athletic</i>			
<u>Season</u>	<u>Division</u>	<u>Paid</u>	<u>Received</u>	<u>Balance</u>	<u>Division</u>	<u>Paid</u>	<u>Received</u>	<u>Balance</u>
		<u>(£)*</u>	<u>(£)*</u>	<u>(£)*</u>		<u>(£)*</u>	<u>(£)*</u>	<u>(£)*</u>
<u>1917/18</u>	Regional	760	430	-330	-	-	-	-
<u>1918/19</u>	Regional	1085	494	-591	-	-	-	-
<u>1919/20</u>	1	3832	4116	284	-	-	-	-
<u>1920/21</u>	1	3916	3931	15	-	-	-	-
<u>1921/22</u>	1	3122	3117	-5	1	2425	3409	984
<u>1922/23</u>	1	3006	3195	189	1	2026	3004	978
<u>1923/24</u>	1	3256	3307	51	2	1585	1897	312
<u>1924/25</u>	1	3215	2776	-439	2	1491	2229	737
<u>1925/26</u>	1	3066	3154	88	2	1778	2126	347
<u>1926/27</u>	1	3548	3308	-240	2	1846	2133	286
<u>1927/28</u>	1	3057	3270	213	2	2135	2154	19
<u>1928/29</u>	1	3524	3275	-249	2	1937	2072	135
<u>1929/30</u>	1	3069	3560	491	2	2466	2430	-36
<u>1930/31</u>	1	3180	3156	-24	2	1675	2118	443
<u>1931/32</u>	1	3156	3226	70	2	1138	1716	578
<u>1932/33</u>	1	2140	2794	654	2	693	1423	729
<u>1933/34</u>	1	2364	2966	602	2	1302	1325	23
<u>1934/35</u>	2	2067	2110	43	2	1588	2603	1016
<u>1935/36</u>	2	3056	2486	-570	3N	800	889	89
<u>1936/37</u>	2	3241	2756	-485	3N	890	816	-74
<u>1937/38</u>	2	3588	3449	-139	3N	1356	1025	-331
<u>1938/39</u>	2	4015	3100	-915	3N	976	993	17

* To nearest pound

Source: Sheffield United Accounts Book; Oldham Athletic Ledger, 1921/22-1938/39

APPENDIX 13

Average Goals Scored in Football League Matches, 1900/01-1937/38

Season	First Division	Second Division	Third Division South	Third Division North
1900/01	2.75	2.35		
1901/02	2.70	2.45		
1902/03	2.90	3.14		
1903/04	3.30	3.14		
1904/05	2.95	2.94		
1905/06	3.26	2.93		
1906/07	3.02	3.02		
1907/08	3.09	3.12		
1908/09	3.11	2.70		
1909/10	3.14	3.06		
1910/11	2.70	2.76		
1911/12	2.78	2.71		
1912/13	3.03	2.95		
1913/14	2.90	2.66		
1914/15	3.16	2.98		
1919/20	2.88	2.78		
1920/21	2.76	2.29	2.45	
1921/22	2.71	2.29	2.41	3.02
1922/23	2.62	2.28	2.46	2.68
1923/24	2.47	2.43	2.54	2.48
1924/25	2.58	2.31	2.42	2.85
1925/26	3.68	3.21	3.36	3.52
1926/27	3.61	3.61	3.44	3.65
1927/28	3.82	3.47	3.63	3.62
1928/29	3.65	3.38	3.49	3.07
1929/30	3.80	3.27	3.53	3.63
1930/31	3.94	3.48	3.61	3.70
1931/32	3.73	3.38	3.66	3.59
1932/33	3.56	3.33	3.53	3.65
1933/34	3.29	3.11	3.30	3.89
1934/35	3.62	3.25	3.31	3.44
1935/36	3.36	3.31	3.24	3.31
1936/37	3.36	3.20	3.23	3.46
1937/38	3.09	2.91	2.73	3.03

Source: Sutcliffe *et al.*, *Football League*, p. 287.

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File 7, Herbert Broomfield Correspondence, May, June 1909

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File 11, Rules of the Association Football Players' Union, 1907

File 19, H. J. Newbould Correspondence, 1914

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